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TWENTY-SIX

Practical SERMONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

By the REVEREND

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Late Lecturer of St. STEPHEN, COLEMAN-STREET,

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AND

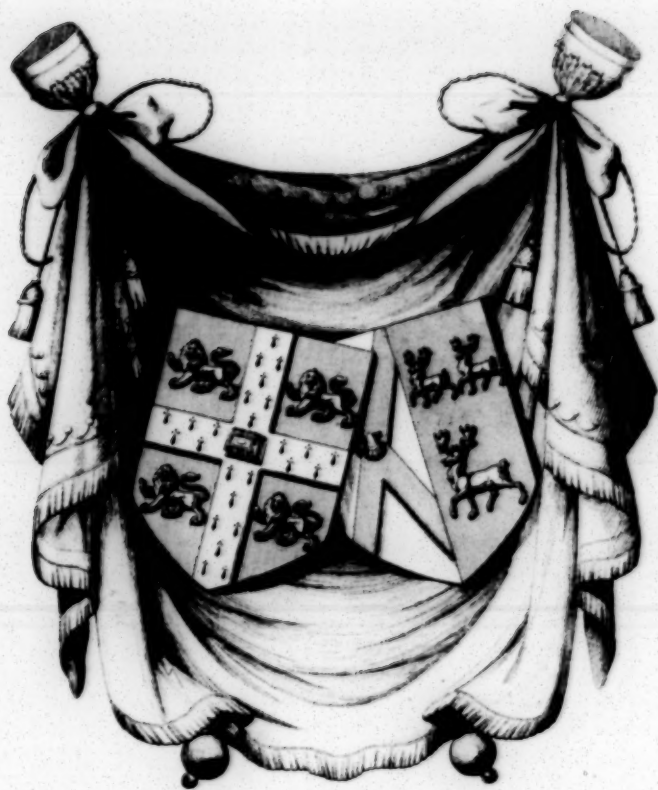
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TO THE
R E A D E R.

THE following Sermons of the Reverend Author, were all prepared for the press, some time before his death, and designed to be published by subscription, on the earnest solicitations of his best friends, who heard them from the pulpit; but their publication was prevented, in his life-time, by a long sickness, and other affecting circumstances, with which it pleased God to afflict him before he died, as appears in manuscript under his own hand. And to justify, in some measure, the approbation of his friends in this matter, let

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let the ingenuous and candid part of mankind read only the following discourses, and be convinced of the reasonableness and impartiality of their choice. The dress they appear in, is the language of the heart, and the thoughts such, as naturally arise from the subject, free from the least shew of the pride of learning, or the false embellishments of art; but animated with a certain strain of seriousness and unaffected piety, in such clearness and perspicuity of expression, and with such weight of argument, as must needs make the perusal of them both entertaining and profitable to all sorts of readers.

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S E R M O N I.

Of E N V Y.

J A M E S iii. 16.

For where envying and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work.

IN this chapter, the Apostle is discoursing on the evils of an unbridled, licentious tongue, and shews the necessity of watching over our words, and avoiding those sins and extravagances it is apt to lead us into; and this, both as an *argument* of our wisdom, and an *ornament* of our profession.

Who (says he, ver. 13) is a wise man, and endued with knowledge, among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom; as if he had said, If any of you desire to approve yourselves more knowing, wiser or better than others, (as all those would certainly be thought, who employ

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employ

ploy their tongues in censuring and *undervaluing* their neighbours) let them shew it to the world, by a better conversation, by doing more good, and by such meekness and humility, as will be an evidence of their wisdom.

For the wise man is always *meek* and *patient*, when the foolish is *passionate* and *proud*. Wisdom teacheth a man to curb his passions, but the *fool rages and is confident*. Envy, strife, and *railing expressions*, shew the folly and corruption of the mind; and they that pretend to wisdom, and can't forbear these things, are but *vain boasters, they glory and lye against the truth*, ver. 14. *This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish*, ver. 15. It produces innumerable mischiefs and miseries in the world; *For where envying and strife is, there is, &c.*

Envy is a wicked, unquiet spirit, and the devil worketh by no instruments more than envious, discontented, malicious people. *Pride* and envy were the two first sins that crept into the world; the first man was ruined by pride, the second destroyed by *envy*.

The whole world could not hold two brothers, when the one was envied by the other; and as *Cain's* envy tasted blood, so the envy of every sinner may be said to thirst after it. Well, therefore, might the apostle say, *Where envy and strife is, there is confusion, &c.*

In

In treating on this vice, that we may the better disclose its nature, and discover its guilt, I shall endeavour,

- I. To give a short description of envy, and shew wherein it consists.
- II. To expose the great folly and sinfulness of it, together with some of the mischiefs it produces. And,
- III. *Lastly*, I shall humbly offer some considerations, which may be proper for the preventing or suppressing it. And,

I. For the nature of this vice: Envy is a displeasure or trouble of mind, arising from the consideration of some blessing or advantage that we know or think another enjoys above ourselves, whether it be wealth, honour, wisdom, &c. If he is reputed to be richer, wiser, or more honourable than ourselves, this raises our envy.

There is, indeed, an uneasiness of mind arising from a reflection upon another's eminency, far different from this of envy; and that is *emulation*, which, tho' in scripture it is sometimes taken in a bad sense, and made to signify the same with envy, (as, *Gal. v. 20*) yet may likewise denote that *generous temper* of mind, which incites to great and

worthy atchievements, and is the spring and *original* of heroic virtue.

In this good sense it is used by the apostle (Heb. x. 24) *Let us consider one another, to provoke unto, i. e. to emulate one another in love and good works.*

But such a concern as this has nothing of *envy* in it; for it makes us only reflect on *ourselves*, as wanting those excellencies we love and admire in *another*: we are only troubled to think how little we have *improved* ourselves in those accomplishments; we are ashamed of our own *negligence* and ill management, and resolve, for the future, to grow more active and industrious in the paths of virtue.

And this, now, is what distinguishes emulation from envy; for the one is no more than a *generous concern* about our own deficiencies, and a *desire* to be as eminently good as our neighbour, (and is a quality generally inherent in great minds;) whereas the other is an *evil eye*, an *ill-natured concern* at his happiness, which would fain blast and destroy it; it is not a desire to rise to his greatness by just and lawful steps, but to bring him down to our own meanness and obscurity.

It is a narrow, selfish temper, that makes a man uneasy, not because he wants, but because another possesses some desirable blessing: he is grieved, not at his own unworthiness,

thinness, but that he cannot bring others to the same level, to the same *low* and degenerate condition with himself.

In a word, it is a malignant wish, a malicious design to depress and degrade our neighbour, and pushes men to defaming and supplanting, to lying and oppression, to treachery and calumny, and other such foul and unmanly practices.

For the confirmation of all which, for the further discovery of the many bad qualities, of which it is compounded, it would not be amiss to turn our eyes on some instances recorded of it in holy scripture; and, first, envy, we there find, was an early vice, it came into the world with original sin, and seems to lie as deep in human nature. For immediately after the fall, *Cain, moved with envy*, slew his brother *Abel*; for that is the account the apostle gives us, because *his own works were evil*, and *his brother's righteous*, 1 John iii. 12. And was it not the same invidious spirit, that put the sons of *Jacob* on that barbarous action of selling their brother *Joseph* a slave into *Egypt*? *The patriarchs moved with envy*, as St. *Stephen* told the *Jews*, *sold Joseph into Egypt*, Acts vii. 9.

Their father *Jacob*, no question, had a tender regard for all his children; but *Joseph* being the youngest, the son of his old age, had received some peculiar marks of his affection, which drew upon him the

envy of the rest, *and they could not speak peaceably unto him.*

A sad instance, by the way, of the mischiefs that are to be expected from the fondness and partiality of a parent, which often proves the *ruin* of the favourite child, and the occasion of such heart-burnings and ill-will among the others, as may at last destroy the peace and happiness of the whole family. And so it happened in the case before us; though God, in his wise providence, turned it in the end to their preservation.

The indulgence of old *Jacob*, not only deprived him for a long while of the enjoyment of his darling son, but had well nigh been the occasion of drawing all the rest into the guilt of shedding innocent blood, even the blood of their own brother: the apprehension of which gave him too just cause of breaking out into lamentation and mourning, and to be afraid *of going down to his grave in tears*, Gen. xxxvii. 35.

Another instance, to shew the detestable nature of envy, is the malicious behaviour of *Saul* towards *David*.

David was a very excellent person, one who had distinguished himself by an unfeigned piety towards God, and an unshaken loyalty to his prince, and a generous love to his country; who had lately done wonders, and delivered both king and people
from

from the hands of the *Philistines*; and who, being the glorious instrument of Providence, in procuring such a miraculous victory, might have reasonably expected the highest returns of esteem and gratitude from both. And truly, it was the gratitude of the people that made *Saul* so ungrateful to him; the victory which *David* had obtained, made the people *joyful*, but *Saul envious*; for he thought his own glory eclipsed by the brightness of the other's, so he was angry, and resolved to destroy that *David*, who had slain his ten thousands, to return evil to him that had done more good than himself; and accordingly, throughout his whole life, was always contriving how to cut off that incomparable hero, who had preserved the whole kingdom.

The last instance I mention is, that of the labourers in the vineyard, *Matt. xx.*

The vineyard here is an emblem of the world, or the true church of God, who calls men to work, though at different times, *i. e.* at different periods of their life, and to different employments. Every one will find him not only just and equitable, but infinitely kind and generous in rewarding his servants. Now, they who came in the morning, *i. e.* in their youth and early age, tho' they had received what they agreed for, and seemed well contented, yet, when they saw others receive as much, who were hired

alter, and as they imagined, had not done so much work as themselves, (tho' here, perhaps, they might be mistaken, for some may do more good in an hour than others in an age, but this they did not consider) their pride made them fancy themselves more deserving than their fellows, and so they grew *envious* and discontented, though they had nothing in truth to make them uneasy, but the *liberality* of their master; and he had done them no injury in being kind to their fellow-servants, and making plentiful distributions of what was his own.

And how often do we find this verified in the world? Men are dissatisfied with their own condition, only because it is not altogether so prosperous as that of some others. And thus, the unbounded goodness of our Heavenly Father is made the true reason why he loses the praise, and men the pleasure of those inestimable mercies he bestows upon us, which are abundantly sufficient to render us happy, *i. e.* as happy as we can expect to be in this life, and would infallibly do so, were not God bountiful to others as well as ourselves. How just is that divine expostulation, ver. 20, *Is thine eye evil, because I am good?*

But this brings me, in the

II^d Place, to shew more particularly the prodigious folly and unreasonableness of this vice of envy.

Now,

Now, this will appear, if we consider it is a sin, to which we cannot pretend the least motive or temptation, either of pleasure or profit, but indeed the direct contrary.

As for pleasure, there can be nothing of this in envy, which consists not in pleasing, but in vexing, disquieting and tormenting one's self, and that to such a degree, that, if we believe a heathen poet,

*Invidiâ Siculi non invenère tyranni
Majus tormentum.*

The tyrants of *Sicily*, the most cruel in the world, could never invent a torment like it.

Now, whatever pleasure an ill-natured man may take in disturbing others, none, sure, can take *any* in tormenting himself; but the folly is, that it is a tormenting one's self to no purpose.

For, who ever did himself any *good* by wishing *evil* to his neighbour?

Shall I ever grow richer or wiser, by envying another man's wealth or wisdom? Will it fill my coffers, to desire his were empty? Or, will it add one cubit to my own stature, to depreciate or detract from his? No.

My envy can do me no good, nor him any real damage. I shall get nothing by it in any respect, but I lose a great deal, even the comfort and satisfaction of all that I possess. Besides,

2dly,

2dly, The folly of it will further appear, when we consider that many of those persons, we are apt to think extremely happy, will be found, upon a nearer examination, to be rather objects of compassion than of envy.

The happiest state, 'tis possible for mortal man to attain to, is but a mixture of joy and sorrow, of sweet and bitter. All the grandeur of this world is vanity and vexation; and could we but see the inward fears and anxieties, the secret crosses and perplexities, that unavoidably break in upon the mind of the greatest man on earth, we should be far from thinking his condition to be envied.

An injudicious spectator, perhaps, might be transported at the pomp and figure of a man advanced to honours, and loaden with preferments, and would give the world to be that *happy* man; but alas! the man himself may be of another opinion, he discovers a vanity in these things, which we cannot discern; and though, before he knew what they were, he grasped as eagerly after them as we can do, yet, *now*, he finds, he has pursued a cloud for a goddess: it *does* not, *cannot* answer his extravagant expectations, and therefore he is still pursuing *something else*, which if he could obtain, he would be as uneasy as before.

This is the case of the most fortunate man upon earth, and a plain demonstration it is,
how

how extremely absurd it must be to envy *any one*, if we look only on the gaiety of his outside.

This, I own, may appear charming, but who knows what tempests and horrors at the same time lodge within! Now, a man's happiness lies in his mind, and this must be consulted before we can pronounce him happy.

To form a right judgment, therefore, in this case, we should consider one another, not in relation to this world, which is vain and transitory, but as Christians, and with an eye to eternity.

Under this view then we know there can be no happiness or unhappiness, properly so called, in this life. *Nemo ante obitum felix*: No man can think himself happy before death, because none knows what *may befall him*; the world being subject to continual changes and revolutions, so that the afflictions we meet with, and which *seem* to make us miserable, may turn to our real benefit.

Let us consider then, if the person we envy be really a good man; why that man is blessed here, and will be happy when this short life is expired, let his present state be what it will; but then what folly is it to envy him that happiness, which all may attain to, if they strive, as well as he? But, on the other hand, if he be a wicked
man,

man, and has no hopes beyond the grave, how pleasantly soever he may pass his time in this world, though he be *clothed in purple, and fare sumptuously every day*, yet behold the dreadful sword of divine wrath hanging by a hair over his head; for he holds his life by as weak a tenure, and when his soul is required of him, his momentary pleasures must end in eternal woe.

And now, canst thou envy such a man as this? or have we not reason to mourn and lament over him, to pity and to pray for him.

Thus we see the extreme folly of this vice in every respect; but now, the wickedness is equal to its folly. For,

1st, *Envy* is a peevish uneasiness at the dispensations of Providence, a bold impeachment both of the justice, goodness, and wisdom of God, as if he had given our neighbour too much, and ourselves too little; and the *same* in effect, as to tell him he does not manage the affairs of the world with such prudence and equity, as for ourselves to acquiesce under his administration.

Now the impudence, the blasphemy and arrogance of such a mal-content and complainer, would never be endured but by a God of infinite patience and forbearance.

Accordingly we observe,

2dly, *Envy* is always ranked in scripture among those abominable works of the flesh, which

which exclude men the *kingdom of heaven*; thus (Gal. v. 21) it is placed at the head of all, *The works of the flesh are envyings, murders, &c.*

And, indeed, it is such a miserable temper of mind, that it would make a man unhappy, even in heaven (if we could suppose such a one there): for if the happiness of *some men* here below, which is but *imaginary*, be so great a vexation to him, how unspeakable must his torment be there, where he would see none but what were *really* and the most exquisitely happy!

But envy, we are sure, will never carry a man *thither*, when it is so directly opposite to *all virtue*, and all the duties we owe to God or man. How inconsistent it is with that reverence and submission we owe to God, we have observed before; for it makes us repine at the decrees of Heaven, and consequently unthankful for all the mercies we enjoy: and then it makes us angry that God should do any good at all to others, as if we desired to monopolize all glory and happiness to ourselves.

So little regard has the envious to charity and good-nature. *Charity* (as the apostle describes it, 1 Cor. xiii.) *suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.*

But

But envy is the very reverse to all this; it is revengeful and cruel, proud and selfish; it is the very spirit and temper of the devil, and turns men into devils; it makes them delight in the calamities, and grieve at the prosperity of their fellow-creatures, and do all they can to bring miseries and misfortunes upon their own friends, neighbours, and acquaintance.

And, that I am not too severe in my censures on this uncharitable vice, will appear from the many mischiefs and disorders it has always produced in the world; which shews it to be as great an enemy to justice as charity.

It is an observation we find daily verified in the world, *Where envy and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work*, James iii. 16.

From whence come wars and murders, the many factions and animosities so common among men, but from *envy*? If we consult the histories, either of ancient or modern times, we shall scarce find any sedition in the state, any schism in the church, or any disturbance in families, but it is chiefly owing to envy. It was this that moved the Devil to attempt the ruin of that divine person, who came down from heaven for our redemption, and the Scribes and Pharisees to deliver up the Lord of Life to

to be crucified and slain. Envy is the daughter of pride, self-love, and ill-nature; to some one or other of which, almost all the sins and mischiefs in the world owe their birth.

It is true, there are degrees in this as in other sins: every envious man may not always run into such excesses, as I have mentioned; and God forbid they should, (for I am afraid there are few entirely clear of it.) However, he that indulges himself in pride, ill-nature, and an envious spirit, is in great danger to be carried on through any obstacle that stands in his way, and to be led, like *Joseph's* brethren, into the most enormous crimes.

I shall hasten therefore to the

III^d and last thing proposed, *viz.* to consider what are the proper remedies to prevent or cure this evil and pernicious disease.

I. The first that seems most proper to be advised, is, that we would endeavour to possess our minds with a strong and lively sense of this great truth, *viz.*

That a most wise and just God is the governor of the world, and that he assigns every man his peculiar rank and station in it, as is most conducive to the ends of infinite wisdom. From hence it is natural to infer, it must be the duty of us, his depend-
ing

ing creatures, to submit chearfully to all his dispensations, and not entertain so much as a murmuring thought at the just decrees of an all-perfect Being.

And, though there may be some *seeming* inequalities in the proceedings of Providence, which our weak reason cannot account for; yet, we may be sure, God acts by the best reason, and by the rules of the most consummate wisdom: nor is he obliged to let us know what these are; he may govern the world as he pleaseth, sure, without calling us to his counsel; and it would be an unparalleled presumption in us, to think of advising or directing him in it.

If, by our honest industry and prudence, or any other laudable way, we can mend the affairs of the world, and make things better, the way is open, and it is our duty to do what good we can, and render ourselves useful and serviceable to the world; and if, after all, we find our good designs frustrated, still there is room for patience and resignation: *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.*

Nothing would sooner pacify our minds under all events, or more effectually engage the Divine Favour, than such a devout submission to God's holy will.

2. Another effectual remedy to suppress this vice, is to subdue and root out of our hearts the chief cause of it, that base temper

per of self-love, and to plant in its room a sincere love and benevolence for all mankind.

It is a principal branch of Christian charity, not only *to weep with them that weep*, i. e. to compassionate and relieve the wants of one another; but also *to rejoice with them that rejoice*, to *congratulate*, and *be pleased* at their prosperity: for, as a truly charitable man would do all he could to make his neighbour happy; so, by consequence, he must *rejoice* when *Providence* has made him so without his *assistance*.

This is that noble and generous disposition which brings us to a near resemblance with our heavenly Father, who is always delighted in the happiness of his children; and never better pleased with them than when they aspire to be like him, and to partake of his glorious perfections.

3. and *lastly*, A serious consideration of our *future* state, wherein every man shall finally receive his *just reward* according to *his works*, would at once silence all repining thoughts about the *present*.

This world, we know, is not the place that can determine our happiness or misery; whatever our condition be here, whether good or bad, it must shortly have an end, and we shall enter on a new scene of things, where all the pomp, the glory, and the gran-

grandeur of this world will be nothing regarded.

Let me consider then ;

I am a Christian, in covenant with God for an eternal inheritance, a crown incorruptible in the kingdom of heaven ; and shall I envy any man the fading satisfactions of this life ; when it is in my power, backed with the Divine Aid, to be as great and as happy as I please ? If I look up to the glories of a future life, I find all men in that view stand upon equal terms of advantage ; *the everlasting doors of the heavenly Jerusalem stand open to all ; and every one that thirsteth, as the prophet declares, may come and drink of this fountain of living waters, even without money, and without price, Isaiah* lv. 1.

True honour and happiness, then, lies within every one's reach ; it is but to chuse life, and we shall have it ; for, according as men excel in the right management of their wills here, so shall they excel in glory hereafter.

When we come to take our last trial for eternity, men will not be valued by their *wealth*, but by their *honesty* ; not by the *height* of their quality, or the dignity of their station, but by the sobriety of their lives, and the regularity of their behaviour.

All

All the advantages of wit or learning, all the privileges of birth or fortune, will there be over-ruled, and set aside; and the beggar shall be advanced above the prince, and the servant above his master, if they have lived better.

But what, then, has envy to do in the world, when all men *may* be happy, if they take care, and no man can be miserable without his own fault?

We shall every one of us in a short time be removed out of this world, into that unchangeable state of being, where the conveniences or inconveniences of this life will be of no service, no more than if they had never been: Where those who have observed the laws of God and the rules of virtue, whatever their condition be here, shall be received into mansions of bliss, prepared for the souls of good men made perfect; but, they, on the other hand, who have lived wicked lives, and preferred the gratifying their own humour to the advancement of God's honour, shall be confined in prisons of eternal sorrow.

And is this our belief? Why then, it should be the principal concern of our lives, to do our own duty, to act our part uprightly and conscientiously, whatever it be, that so we may be exalted and not degraded in another world.

Would we set carefully to this, as we should have no leisure nor inclination to envy other men, so neither should we greatly desire such a state of life, as might raise the envy of others.

Let it be our main employment then, to perform our part well, and leave it to God to chuse, who best knows what is proper for us. Let there be no envy, strife or contention among us, unless it be to provoke unto love and good works.

It is no great matter what condition God is pleased to allot us in this world, since the fashion of it soon passeth away, and the rich, noble, and mighty men must die, as well as the poor and ignorant, and appear before a tribunal, where there will be no *respect of persons*, no regard paid to any thing but real virtue, and where alone the degrees of true honour and distinction will be settled for all eternity. At which dreadful day, that we may all be acquitted with honour, let us endeavour to frame our mind, now, by this petition of our litany.

From envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, good Lord deliver us.

S E R M O N II.

Of CALLING and ELECTION.

M A T T H E W xxii. 14.

For Many are called, but Few are chosen.

FOR the better understanding of this short, but comprehensive saying, we must look back into the occasion of it; which was this:

Our Lord, in this chapter, delivers a parable, wherein he compares the *kingdom of heaven* to a *certain king*, who made a *marriage for his son*, ver. 1. Where, by the king is understood Almighty God, the king of kings, and supreme governor of the world; who, intending to celebrate that *mystical union* between his son Jesus Christ and the Church, stiled in Scripture the *beloved* or *spouse* of Christ, (which he had all along foretold by the prophets, and for which the appointed time was now come) he

sent first to *call them that were before bidden*, i. e. the *Jews*, the offspring of his servant *Abraham*; a nation he had long preserved, and sustained by miracles, which he had separated from the rest of the world, to be his *peculiar people*, and whom he had trained up to the knowledge and service of the true God, and that great *Messiah*, which was to come for the redemption of the world: The time and circumstances of whose miraculous birth they were particularly informed of, and therefore might have been supposed ready to comply with the first invitation.

But they would not come, as we find, *ver. 3.* The king (full of compassion and long-suffering, slow to anger, and of great goodness) sends to them again, *ver. 4.* tells them *he had prepared his dinner, and all things were ready.*

But they still *made light of it*, and having (like too many in these days) other business to follow, which they esteemed of greater moment, *went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandize*, *ver. 5.* Their minds, it seems, were so far engaged in their worldly employments, their *farms* and *merchandize*, that they had no leisure or inclination to look after the spiritual concerns of another life: Nay, some of them were such graceless wretches, that *they took the king's servants*, i. e. the prophets and apostles of Christ,

Christ, and *treated them spitefully, and slew them*, ver. 6.

They not only rejected the invitation, but even abused those that brought it; they most inhumanly murdered those innocent persons, that came to invite them to a marriage-feast, and *to eat bread in the kingdom of God*, Luke xiv. 15.

This barbarous cruelty and ingratitude so far incens'd the king, that he *sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city*, ver. 7. i. e. by the *Roman* armies these wicked *Jews*, who had slain his prophets and messengers, and even Jesus Christ, the Prince of life, were at length entirely cut off and dispersed, and their royal city *Jerusalem* burnt with fire; all which happened (as history informs us) about forty years after our Lord's crucifixion.

Now those, that were first bidden, having thus ungratefully refused to come, and being therefore judged unworthy to partake of the king's feast, he sends his servants into *the high-ways*, i. e. God now sent to the *Gentiles* (who had been hitherto aliens to the commonwealth of *Israel*, and strangers to the covenant of promise) to invite *them* to embrace the blessed tidings of that gospel, which the *Jews* had so scornfully rejected.

The servants did as they were commanded, *preached the gospel to every creature, and gathered together as many as they found*,

so that *the wedding was furnished with guests*. But among these, it seems, there were bad as well as good; for the king, *coming in to see his guests, saw there a man who had not a wedding garment*, ver. 11. By *which man*, (tho' our Lord in charity mentions but one) are represented *all* those, who trust only to their outward *call* and profession, and neglect to clothe themselves with those christian graces and virtues, which are indispensably necessary to salvation.

Now, though these last come at the first invitation, and readily embrace the gospel at the first hearing, yet, since they neglect its precepts, live not agreeable to, or worthy of their vocation, they are by the king's order, to be *cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth*, ver. 13. And then follows that dreadful sentence, as a reflection on the whole, *Many are called, but few, &c.*

God's gracious *call* extends to *many*, i. e. to *all* that have been admitted into the christian church, or have ever heard of the gospel.

But among the *many called, few* there are that will hearken to this call; fewer yet, that sincerely obey it, that come cloathed with a wedding garment; and therefore, *though many are called, few are chosen*.

The parable thus explained, seems to point out, 1st, The happy state and noble privileges of us christians, to whom God has
vouch-

Of CALLING and ELECTION. 25

vouchsafed the offers of grace here, and eternal glory hereafter. 2dly, The base ingratitude of such as refuse to comply with such gracious proposals.

And therefore, for a further illustration of it, I shall endeavour, in the following discourse,

I. To shew you, in *what sense*, and for what end, God may be said to *call many*.

II. I shall briefly consider the truth of this assertion in the text.

III. *Lastly*, I shall enquire into the reasons of it, why of many called, few are chosen. And,

I. God is here said to *call* us, not by an *immediate voice from heaven*, as he did *Abraham, Moses*, and the other patriarchs, nor by any *sudden motion or inspiration* within, as some *modern enthusiasts* pretend; but he calls us by his servants, the prophets and apostles of Christ, *i. e.* by his sacred word contained in holy Scripture, which is no other than *God's voice* to man, wherein is revealed and manifested his whole will and pleasure, and whereby he intreats us to repent, and live such good lives upon earth, that we may be happy for ever in heaven.

For

For thus it is, that *God was pleased, at sundry times and in divers manners, to speak in times past to the fathers by the prophets, and hath now in these last days spoken to us by his son*, Heb. i. 1. And for what end and design, we are told by the mouth of this last and greatest messenger of heaven, who says expressly, he came to *call sinners to repentance*, Matt. ix. 13.

Accordingly, he went about, while he continued upon earth, exhorting men to *repent, and believe the gospel*; and when he had accomplished the great work of our redemption, and was going to ascend into his glory, he commanded his apostles to *go into all the world, to preach the gospel to every creature, to tell them all things, as he had commanded, promising to be with them, even to the end of the world*.

Which promise could not belong peculiarly to the apostles, because they were all soon after martyred and slain; but is understood to extend likewise to the succeeding ministers of the gospel, which were ordained by the apostles, to teach and call upon mankind in future ages, and will continue so to do, to the end of time.

By which gospel, God has called us *out of darkness, into his marvellous light*; for so the apostle tells us, 1 Pet. ii. 9. They who before wandered in the darkness of error, superstition, idolatry, and ignorance, are
now

now conducted into the paths of *truth*, *light*, and knowledge.

Man indeed was, at first, created with a perfect knowledge and understanding; God did not make him a companion for the beasts that perish, but infused into him a ray of his own incomprehensible glory; an immortal spirit, which, would of its own nature, were it permitted, mount up to God, its chief and only happiness. But by wilful transgression, and the prevalency of evil affections, this perfect light of the soul was much darkened, and our reason so far eclipsed, that our inclinations were only evil continually. Nay, some, alas! the greatest part of the world, made stocks and stones their gods, addressing to things inanimate, which can neither hear, nor see, to receive their prayers, to relieve their wants, and defend them from their enemies.

Thus was the reason of men defaced, and their minds so far infatuated, that they became almost as stupid and senseless, as those very idols they adored.

But God, of his infinite mercy, has now raised us out of this dark and disconsolate state, to the comfortable light of the gospel of Christ; we that sat in *darkness and the shadow of death*, upon us has the light shined; we, who were before carried away to those dumb idols, just as we were led, are now instructed to know and worship the true

true God, to fly from all idolatry and superstition, and to yield a rational service and obedience to him, from whom we receive every good thing we enjoy. We are called likewise from *all sin and impiety*, to *holiness and virtue*.

We, that before, in our former times of ignorance, wallowed in all kinds of sins and immoralities, are now commanded *every where to repent*, Acts xvii. 30. to be a *holy people, zealous of good works*. For *the grace of God has appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness, &c.* Tit. ii. 11. For God has *not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness*, 1 Thes. iv. 7.

We must not live now in any of those disorders and corruptions, which were *accounted* innocent among *Jews* and infidels. For we are christians, whom *God has called with an holy calling*, 2 Tim. i. 9. and as he *that has called us, is holy, so should we be holy in all manner of conversation*.

2dly, God has further called us from the pursuit of things carnal and temporal, to seek after such as are spiritual and eternal.

God has implanted in man a soul, a principle distinct from the body, whose desires are so vast and extensive, that it cannot be satisfied by all that this world can give. For he that *enjoys the greatest* share of it, has the fullest demonstration, that it is vanity and vexation. God, therefore, has invited us
to

to the enjoyment of himself, to the fruition of him, who is the only fountain of true felicity. He has now made himself our God, he is become the portion of our souls, and nothing will they desire in heaven or earth, if they know their happiness, in comparison of him. We are now required to *set our affections on things above*, where our treasure is, and not on Things on the earth; for if we *do so*, we debase the dignity of our nature, as well as lose the great privileges of our calling.

3dly, We, who before, while we lived in error and impiety, were consequently liable to extreme misery and eternal wrath, are now advanced to the hopes of endless glory and felicity. God has now called us, as he did *Lot out of Sodom*, into a land of safety; he has called us into his church, as he did *Noah* into the ark, to save him from the deluge; and as long as we continue in it, we cannot fail of salvation, if we work it out with fear and trembling.

Thus, we see, for what end and purpose men are now called to embrace the gospel, even that they might awake out of the sleep of sin, into the glorious light and liberty of the sons of God; that they might live holy and virtuous lives, and leave the pursuit of vanity, in order to be made partakers of eternal glory.

And

And how inexcusable then must be the folly of those, who reject such kind invitations, such beneficial proposals, when offered by *no less a being*, than the supreme God, the king of kings; by the hand of a person, *no less honourable*, than that of his *true and only son*, the *express image* of his own glory.

And yet, alas! that there are many such, is what we here find expressly asserted, and is the second thing to be considered: *Many are called*, says Christ, *but few are chosen*: But I shall not enter on a distinct, elaborate proof of this matter; our Lord has *said so*, and truly we have more reason, I fear, to bewail, than to prove it.

For if we consider the corrupted state of *Christendom* in general, or of this nation in particular; if we do but reflect how iniquity abounds among all orders and degrees of men; who, though they call themselves christians, yet, if we compare their manners and actions with the rules of the gospel, we shall find but few that live like christians; many that are a scandal to their name, and few but live contrary to their profession; and, consequently, but few can be discerned by the light of scripture, to be chosen by God to eternal life.

Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth to life, and few there be that find it, Matt. vii. 14.

A hard saying, indeed, and what we have cause to *admire*, as well as *lament*!

For are not men endued with reason? does not this teach them to pursue their own interest and happiness? *Have they no knowledge* to discern between good and evil? Have they not the means of grace offered them in the gospel? Are they not continually called upon, and put in mind of their duty and happiness? And is not the holy spirit of God always ready to co-operate and assist them in their endeavours? What then can be the reason, that of so many who are *called* and invited to, and assisted in their pursuit of heaven, so few attain to it?

Do we think it is God's will and pleasure, they should miscarry? Is he pleased with the destruction of his creatures?

God forbid we should admit such a thought, of a being infinite in goodness! *As I live*, saith the Lord, *I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should repent and live*, Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

We must confess with the apostle, *known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world*: God knows what the tempers and manners of Men *will be*, long before they are born; he knows whether they will be objects of *mercy* or *wrath*, of *election* or *reprobation*.

But far be it from us, to determine presumptuously concerning the secret councils
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and decrees of an almighty mind; whatever is necessary for us to know, is plainly revealed in scripture, and there must we look for the reasons of this strange and surprising truth,

Many are called, but few chosen; and which is the third and last thing proposed to be enquired into.

God, we are sure, cannot be the author of man's destruction; that so many miscarry in the grand affair of salvation, cannot proceed from God; the reasons of this therefore must be fetched elsewhere, and that must be, I believe, from ourselves, from our own folly and disobedience; and that it is so, will appear evident, if we consider those our Lord has here given in the parable before us, which I come now more particularly to explain. For,

1. The first reason assigned in the parable, why of many called few are chosen, is their own *wilfulness* and *obstinacy*.

For, when the servants *went* and invited them *to the marriage*, it is said, they peremptorily refused, *would not come*, ver. 3. Here, we see, the fault was in their own wills, *they would not come*; and, is it not easy to be observed, that one great impediment to the efficacy of religion, is the corruption and depravation of men's wills, which are so deluded and enslaved by sensual lusts and pleasures, that they have, as it were,

were, a natural aversion to the purity of the gospel? And therefore, though they are fully convinced of the beauty and excellency of its precepts, that they tend to the advancement of their true interest both temporal and eternal, yet *they will not comply, will not submit to be guided by it.* They see their error and the folly of sin, and yet will not be persuaded to grow wiser.

Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.

Let *Moses* and the prophets, let Christ and his apostles say what they will; let the succeeding ministers of religion use what powerful arguments they are able; yea, let God himself speak ever so loudly and terribly in his *judgments*, yet *they will not bear*; they are resolved to *continue in their sins*, to pursue the things of the world, and despise their own mercy; and all the reason they can give why they do so, is no more than this, because *they will.* *They have loved strangers*, as the prophet represents them, *and after them they will go*, Jer. ii. 25.

Here then we perceive the true source and origin of man's destruction; it is of our own *procuring*, it is our own unhappy *will and choice*.

God the father sends forth his servants, entreating us to turn from our evil ways; *Why will ye die?* says he, *turn and live*, and

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let not iniquity be your ruin. Jesus Christ, the son of God, laid aside his glory, lived an obscure life, and at last died a painful death, to render the way of *salvation passable and easy*; but yet, notwithstanding, we will *not walk* in it. If we still chuse the broad path of *destruction*, and perish therein, we have nothing to complain of, but our own *contumacy and perverseness*.

2. Another reason, *why of many called, few are chosen*, is the infidelity of mankind; because they do not believe the truth and reality of the things they are invited to.

When the king's first servants returned with no success, he sent forth others, with more particular instructions, but these also could gain no belief; for tho' they told them, *the dinner was prepared, the oxen and fatlings killed, and all things ready*, yet the guests *made light of it*, and would not give credit to what they said.

Thus did the prophets under the *old*, thus do Christ and his apostles under the *New Testament*, call and exhort men to *come and drink of the fountain of living waters, to partake of the bread that came down from heaven*; and that except they repent, they must all perish.

But, alas! to what end is all their preaching and exhortations, if men *will not believe*? and yet if they *did believe*, it is impossible they should behave as they do, and
turn

turn their backs on such glorious overtures, which it is so much their own interest to hearken to.

But if men will not *believe*, this makes the thing clear; and no wonder, that of *many called, few are chosen*, when they will not believe the truth and reality of that *inestimable happiness*, which is offered to them.

3. A third reason for what is intimated in this parable, is the excessive love and fondness for the pleasures and delights of the present life. For they that were bidden, we find, *made light* of the kind invitation, *and went their way, one to his farm, another to his merchandize*.

They did not think it worth their while to go, tho' to the marriage-feast of a king's son; they preferred the toil and slavery of their trades and merchandize, before the honour of so noble an entertainment. And is it not the same at this day?

How few give themselves leisure to consider the beauty and amiableness of the christian religion! They have no idea of the excellency of virtue and piety, and the things of the spirit, because their minds are *carnal*, incapable of discerning or knowing what they are; they are so habituated to sensual objects, so nearly affected with the serpent's curse, *to feed on the dust of the ground*, that they have no taste or relish

for spiritual entertainments; their thoughts are always chained down to things below, employed in getting or improving their estates, which they esteem of greater concernment, than the business of their souls, or another world.

Did Christ invite men to the possession of great employments, to crowns and scepters, to temporal power and dominion, what striving would there be, who should be first chosen, who *should be greatest in his kingdom*? Did he now promise to multiply loaves to the people, he would then have multitudes of followers.

But the things he *calls* men to, are of another nature; he calls them *to repent* and renounce their beloved sins, to despise the world, to deny themselves, to take up the cross, and follow him by faith into Heaven.

But these things are contrary to the humours and inclinations of men, displeasing, distasteful to flesh and blood.

And therefore, let them be *called* ever so earnestly, they make light of it, they are pre-engaged, their heads are taken up another way, and so they despise the invitation, if they do not abuse the person that brings it. For,

4. This we observe, in the parable, is sometimes the case; there is in some men a strange, unaccountable prejudice and antipathy

pathy against God and religion; they are sworn enemies to both, and act with the utmost hostility against all that appear in defence of either. *The remnant took his servants, and treated them spitefully and slew them,* ver. 6.

But what inhuman creatures, what savage men were these! The servants came to invite them to a feast, and were murdered for their civility.

And I wish there were no room for a complaint of this kind, in the present age.

There is such an *innate malice* and *aversion* in some men, to the purity of the christian religion, that they are ready to persecute and destroy all that truly and faithfully preach it to them. Let them be informed in ever so charitable a way, of the danger of their sins, let them be entreated ever so mildly to forsake them, they are *angry* and *affronted*. And, if men cannot bear to be reproved, no wonder if they are never reclaimed; no wonder that of *many called, few are chosen*, when they reckon those their enemies, that would kindly lead them into the truth. But,

5. *Lastly*, The last reason our Lord has given in this parable, is, because of those who are *called* and obey this *call*, many come not with *due qualifications*; they live not up to their profession, nor *walk worthy of the vocation* wherewith they are *called*,

and therefore are excluded with the man in the parable, as not having on a *wedding-garment*, not *adorned* with those graces and virtues the gospel requires.

For among the great numbers of christians, how many live, as if they thought the bare name, and formal profession of christianity sufficient for salvation; whose faith is dead, because not accompanied with good works! Whilst others again imagine, they can merit heaven, by works without faith; that they can do enough of themselves, and have no need of a Saviour to do any thing for them.

How many are zealous for little things, and neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth! And how many observe some precepts with more than ordinary strictness, that they may indulge themselves the more securely, in the violation of others!

And thus, between these and many *others*, that, like *Agrippa*, are but *half persuaded to be Christians*, which are far the greater number of those who are *called*, either the infinite merits, or the indispensable laws of Christ are vilified and despised. But, surely, this can never be the way to be *elected* to eternal life.

The gospel, we know, requires a *sincere* repentance, a *sincere* obedience, and when we have done all, an humble confidence in
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the merits of Christ for acceptance and salvation; and, whoever falls short of this, tho' he is *called*, yet he can *never* be *chosen*, whatever pretensions men may make to *sanctity*, to *grace*, to the *election* and favour of God, without a sincere endeavour after true righteousness and a real obedience to the gospel, they will find themselves, at the last day, in the same condition as the poor man in this parable; who, when found without a wedding-garment, was *struck speechless*, and had not a word to say in his own defence.

But now, should this discourage or frighten us? By no means. It should rather animate and quicken us, to use the more diligence, to make *our calling and election sure*.

What if there be *few chosen*? Yet, *some* there are; and, why may not you and I, and every particular person here, be in that number? No question we might, if we would *earnestly strive* as our Lord advises, to *enter in at the strait gate*; to adorn ourselves with all those virtues the gospel recommends, and, after our sincere endeavours, to believe and trust in the merits of Christ for our justification. This if we do, we need not fear; how few soever are *chosen* of the many *called*, yet we shall be in the number of those *happy few*, who are admitted to

partake of *the marriage-supper of the lamb*,
Rev. xix. 9.

In the mean time, let us beg of almighty God, that as he has been pleased to call us out of darkness, &c. so he would give us grace to eschew all such things as are contrary to our profession, and follow all such as are agreeable to the same; and so to work out our salvation, as to make our calling and election sure, through Jesus Christ.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N III.

Of COVETOUSNESS.

I T I M O T H Y vi. 9, 10.

But they that will be rich, fall into Temptation and a Snare, and into many foolish and hurtful Lusts, which drown Men in Destruction and Perdition. For the Love of Money is the Root of all Evil—

AMONG the many sad causes that contribute to the decay of true piety, and to that profaneness and corruption of manners, which is become a reproach to Christians, this, possibly, may not be the least inconsiderable: A restless will, and desire of being rich. They that *will* be rich, says the apostle, *fall into temptation and a snare*; and in the next verse, *the love of money is the*
root

root of all evil. Those sensual objects we here converse with, and which, indeed, are necessary for the comfort and conveniences of the present life, do, upon that account, so far engross our affections, that the *spiritual* truths of religion can make little or no impression upon us. And while we call ourselves Christians, many of us live worse than *Turks* or Heathens, and are guilty of such vile practices, for the sake of worldly wealth, as a sober infidel would be ashamed of. Now, from such an extravagant, inordinate love of riches, the apostle endeavours to dissuade us by two arguments. 1. From the excellency of godliness, which, of itself, is *great gain*, ver. 6. and sufficient to make us *contented* with the bare necessities of life, *food* and *raiment*, ver. 8. and will *then* prove the best gain to us, when all others fail. For as we *brought nothing into the world, so we can carry nothing out, but this*; nothing but our good works will follow us beyond the grave. 2. From the consideration of the many snares, temptations and dangers, into which the love of money betrays men: For this is *the root of all evil*, which *while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*; they have turned apostates from the faith, denied their Saviour, and, by their scandalous immoralities, done despite to the holy spirit of God;

God; there being scarce any vice or mischief, but what proceeds from this as its root, this being the chief fountain, from whence all other waters of bitterness flow. *But thou, O man of God, flee these, &c.* I presume, I cannot better answer the design or promote the instruction of those that hear me, than by endeavouring to lay before you,

I. The true nature of covetousness, and wherein it consists.

II. The great sin and folly of it. And,

III. What are the most proper methods and expedients, for the suppressing and avoiding it. And,

I. As to the *nature of this vice*: And here it must be observed, that the gospel of Christ, as much as it forbids the setting our affections on the world, does not condemn an honest and industrious endeavour to make a comfortable provision for ourselves and families; a prudent care to improve our estates, and acquire an honourable subsistence in the world; for we are commanded *to labour; six days shalt thou labour*: And if we can procure *wealth* by the ways of a *virtuous industry, frugality, and temperance*, it is highly *commendable*, and may serve to great and worthy purposes. This is what *good*
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œconomy requires, and what *Christianity* does by no means disallow of. But then, when men are *more solicitous* and concerned for *temporals* than *spirituals*; when they make the acquisition of wealth the *principal* business of their lives; are so *earnestly set* on providing for the body, as *wholly to neglect* the *soul*; so *intent* upon the present corruptible world, as to *despise* or renounce their *eternal* inheritance in the next; when they chuse rather to make shipwreck of a good conscience, than *forego* a prospect of *gain*, then may they be said to be *covetous*; so that the nature of it seems to consist in these three things, which you may take as the peculiar marks of a covetous man.

1. The having such an *excessive value and esteem* for wealth, as if it were a thing could make men more *happy*, and give them more satisfaction, than all other things whatsoever: For it is certainly the secret opinion of the covetous, (contrary to our Saviour's assertion) *that the happiness of a man's life doth consist only in the abundance of the things he possesseth*; this makes them pursue their gain by all manner of ways, even the most impious and unjust; by a *lie*, as did *Gebazi*; by *perfidy* and treachery, as *Judas* did; *What will ye give, &c.* says he to the chief priests, and *I will betray, &c.* by fraud, oppression, theft, violence, false testimony, &c. Nothing, in short, is so
wicked,

wicked, but what men will venture upon, to gratify this insatiable passion.

2. As a consequence of the other, the *being highly pleased and delighted* in the possession of it, so as not to mind what we want beside; for thus you find the covetous man in the gospel wonderfully transported with the view of *his ground bringing forth plentifully*, and his full barns, *as if he desired nothing else to make him happy*; and he said to himself, *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, &c.* He had no desire to be *rich toward God*, or lay up a treasure in heaven; to employ his wealth to promote the happiness of others, or procure the favour of God; all his concern and delight was to *board up*, and keep all to himself, which was a plain indication of a heart that values these *temporal enjoyments*, more than *God's favour*, or *eternal riches*; which, in the judgment of *St. Paul*, renders a man guilty of *idolatry*. Hence it follows,

3. That the covetous is still *desirous of more* than he has, or really needs; he is never easy or contented: For it being his fixed principle, that wealth only can make him happy, it is certain that he can never think himself *happy enough*, nor, consequently, *rich enough*; how much soever he has, he still desires *more*, because his desires can never be satisfied, even by the possession of what he desires; for the soul naturally desires happiness,

ness, which can never be found, even in the enjoyment of all that this world can afford. Such is the nature of covetousness. And,

II. The great sin and folly of it will appear from the innumerable *mischiefs* and *miseries* into which it betrays men; for it puts them upon all sorts of wickedness and immoralities, to compass their designs; and then, like most other vices, pays them only with remorse, disappointment, and pain.

It is the observation of *Solomon*, *He that maketh haste to be rich, shall not be innocent*, Prov. xxviii. 20. And the apostle tells us, *They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare; for the love of money is the root of all evil*, it undermines the very foundation of all virtue, and destroys all the duties we owe to God, to man, or ourselves: It is impossible, says Christ, *to serve God and mammon: We may use one as a means, and the other as an end; but to put them in a competition and equality—that cannot be: No, if any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him*. When a man's eye and heart is upon the world, he is alienated from God. Lay but a *good bargain*, or any opportunity of gain, in the miser's way, and he will neglect his friends, his prayers, his soul, and every religious duty, to attend it. And then, he is an utter enemy to *humanity* and all the *social* virtues; so far from relieving his brother in distress, that he had rather see him

him starve, than diminish his own useless heaps; he looks upon pity and compassion as a *weakness*, desires to engross all to himself, and seems to act in perfect enmity with all the world. It is this love of money, that makes men *sell themselves to work wickedness*; hence proceed envy, hatred, and quarrels among neighbours; heresy, schism, and sacrilege in the church; perjury, treason, and corruption in the state. It is this that divides a house or kingdom against itself, and brings it to desolation; which dissolves the bonds of charity and natural affection; that sets parents against their children, and makes children wish for the death of their parents; that has made some conspire the ruin of their own brethren and relations, and brought others to lay *violent* hands on themselves: *So is the way of every one that is greedy of gain, which taketh away the lives of the owners thereof*, Prov. i. 19. To say all in a word, there is scarce any impiety to be committed against God, any injury to be offered to man, nothing so cruel and inhuman, but that covetousness will put men upon it.

And yet, when a man now has actually *done* all the infamous things in his power, for the attainment of wealth; when he has lost his *honour*, his virtue, his conscience, his health, in the acquisition of it; what *returns*, what *satisfaction*, what amends or reward,

reward, has he for all his labour and fatigue? Nothing but *discruciating cares* and vexation of spirit. Even in the midst of plenty, he wants the real enjoyment of the common conveniencies of life. He is *poor* and indigent even in all his affluence. *There is an evil, says Solomon, which I have seen, and it is common among men; A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all he desireth; yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it, Eccles. vi. 1, 2. This is vanity, and it is an evil disease.* And yet, this is the common punishment the divine providence has inflicted on such men; they take no *satisfaction* themselves, no refreshment from all their *abundance*. *Gebazi*, you observe, when he had, by a fraud and falshood, obtained a great sum of money and changes of raiment from *Naaman*, had little use or enjoyment of his booty: For he was smitten with a *leprosy incurable*, and which *stuck* to him and his posterity for ever. *Judas*, when he had betrayed his master, and received the promised bribe, could not be at rest, had no taste or pleasure in his bargain; but came and brought again the thirty pieces of silver, and then departed and went and hanged himself. *Ananias and Sapphira*, when by lying to the Holy Ghost, they had *saved*, as they thought, part of their estate for their
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own *private* use, got nothing by it in the end; for they were struck dead upon the spot. Thus, with regard only to the present life, the covetous man is guilty of the *greatest folly*, since he pursues an end by such *means* as will certainly disappoint him of his aim, and defeat all his expectations. But then, consider his conduct in respect to the grand interest of his soul and his future hopes, and he will still more justly deserve that character given us by the holy Psalmist: A man of *no understanding, and like the beasts that perish*. For he throws up the noble privileges of Christianity, the dignity of his nature, the inestimable rewards of heaven, for a small estate upon earth; he parts with all that is truly good and valuable, for *trifles*. Did the miser take more pleasure in the enjoyments of the world, than other men; did he receive some *extraordinary* satisfaction from his abundance; did his *happiness* encrease with his wealth, there might be something said in his excuse; but nothing of this can be pretended, for he is condemned to torment without intermission; he is *always* complaining, and *always* afraid of want in the midst of plenty; between the care of getting more, and the fear of losing what he has, he is in a state of continual distraction and uneasiness: So that what the Psalmist says of man in general, was never *more true* than of him: *He walketh in a vain*
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shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain: Or that of the Prophet; As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and in the end shall be a fool, Jer. xvii. 11. And this now is the end of all the pains and fatigues of the covetous; his insatiable spirit makes him *rise early, late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness*; it throws him into the *fire and water*, into all kinds of distresses and perplexities; and this he suffers not for any considerable reward neither, not out of any worthy design of serving his country, or promoting the welfare of mankind; but, only to *vex himself, oppress and disturb his neighbours, and lose his soul for ever.*

If therefore, men would live comfortably in this world, or be happy in another, let them beware of the deceitfulness of riches; and whether *they encrease* or no, *set not their hearts upon them.* And, that we may be the better able to keep clear of this vice, and escape the dreadful consequences of it, I would beg leave,

III. *Lastly*, to recommend the following rules and directions.

I. Consider the vanity and emptiness of worldly grandeur, which carries but a false glitter with it, and deceives only those *weak* men, who judge by *outward appearance.* For how *unprofitable* is it to the best part
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of man, his soul! Does it *mend* or improve the mind, which is properly the man? Does it tend to the reforming *any vice*, or the informing him of *any noble* and worthy actions? On the contrary, it is rather matter of temptation, danger and difficulty. So that our Saviour says, *it is easier for a camel to go through, &c.* Where an estate is acquired by *dishonesty*, it is matter for repentance, not of triumph; and, to what purpose is it for a man to *accumulate* and get that by fraud, or oppression, which he cannot *enjoy*, which he cannot call his own, when he has it? Will riches ennoble the soul, or make it better and more acceptable to God? Will they protect us in the hour of death, or plead our cause in the day of judgment? No. *God accepteth not the persons of princes*, says *Job*, *nor regardeth the rich more than the poor*, *Job xxxiv. 19.* Nay, the more we abound in this world, the greater danger we are in of suffering eternal want and misery in another. For riches profit not in the day of wrath; it is *righteousness only*, and a good use of them, that can support us in trouble, or *deliver from death*.

2. Remember, as we are men, so are we Christians, called to the possession of greater things than this world can give. Besides our secular profession, we have a high and heavenly calling; and at the end of it, a

kingdom, a never fading crown of glory. And, should such as we spend our time in scraping together the dirt and clay we tread upon, which ought to be as much beneath our concern, as it is below our dignity? Do but imagine, what fools and mad-men the blessed saints above must esteem us to be, when they behold us anxiously busy about trifles, and at the same time neglecting those everlasting honours which they enjoy, and are now graciously offered to us?

3. Let us consider, we are every one of us, in respect to God, but as stewards or servants; obliged to improve all we have to our Master's glory. Consequently, the more we have, the more are we to account for, *the more is our charge augmented*; for, *to whom much is given, of him shall be much required*, Luke xii. 48. And, should we then desire a great deal, or be proud in our abundance, when it will only swell our account; and, if abused, encrease our eternal condemnation?

4. Reflect on the *uncertainty* of riches. Supposing they were sufficient for the happiness of the present life, yet, how suddenly do they *take themselves wings and fly away*! We must necessarily *trust* others with them, we cannot have them always in our hands, nor always in our sight. The friend by falshood, the thief by fraud and craft, the mighty man by his power, may take them from us. In respect of all these
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are we in danger. Nothing, in short, can possibly secure them to us, but a pious and charitable use of them. We should never then forget to do good, or be backward to distribute to the needy, in proportion to what we have received; but strive to be rich in good works, glad to communicate; for, in so doing, we insure the possession and true enjoyment of our wealth here, and lay up a good foundation against the time to come.

5. We must learn to put a firm trust and confidence in God, who has promised, that if we *first seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all these, &c.* Honest labour and industry, a frugal management and good œconomy, are duties necessary in every station of life; and after we have done our endeavour by these means, to procure a *competency* for ourselves and families, we are to leave the event of things to providence; we are to be no farther *anxious* or *solicitous*, for the raising of great fortunes; since the happiness of life consisteth not in *abundance*, but in the *moderation of our desires*, in a *quiet and easy conscience*; nor are we to vex ourselves with fears of *want*, with the apprehension of spending all we have and coming to poverty hereafter; which, our Saviour tells us, is a *sign of little faith and great distrust* in God; whose never-failing goodness provides even for beasts and birds, and much more for *those men*, that

have made it the business of their lives to please him.

Let your conversation therefore, says the apostle, be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have: For God hath promised, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee; so that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

6. *Lastly, Let it be our prayer to God, as it was David's, that he would incline our hearts to his testimonies, and not to covetousness; that he would raise our affections to things above, and not suffer the little concerns of this life to divert us from the serious thoughts of that which is to come; that he would infuse into our minds this one great truth, that no loss is comparable to that of innocence and a good conscience, and that nothing is to be feared, like the displeasure of an omnipotent God. In a word, that he would give us grace, to forsake all covetous desires and inordinate love of riches; and, as the apostle exhorts Timothy, to follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, patience, meekness; that we make it our principal care, by such means as these, to provide for eternity, and lay up a treasure in heaven, that never faileth, &c.*

S E R M O N IV.

The U N J U S T S T E W A R D.

P A R T I.

L U K E xvi. 8.

And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

IN these words, our Saviour concludes his parable of the unjust steward, who having been found unfaithful to his master, was commanded *to give an account of his stewardship*; for he should be no longer steward, *ver. 2.* Upon which he begins to cast about, and consider with himself, which way he could best provide for his fu-

ture subsistence; *What shall I do?* says he to himself, *for my lord taketh from me the stewardship: I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed,* ver. 3. However, after some deliberation, he at last resolves on this method, to try if he could procure the friendship and interest of his lord's debtors, that when he was discharged from his office, they might be prevailed upon *to receive him into their houses*; so he calls on every one of them, and reckons with them; but his demands were so very favourable, that he knew this would be a strong inducement to incline them to assist him in his extremity; for to *one* that owed an hundred measures of oil, instead of requiring the whole, he bid him take his bill, and write fourscore; to another that owed the same, he bid him write fifty; which when his lord knew, tho' he could not but be much displeased with him, as he had reason, for being so unjust and false to his trust, and adding one treachery to another; yet he could not but commend him at the same time, for making such a *provision* for himself; and the lord, that is, his master, commended the *unjust* steward (*How?* not for his *injustice*, for that was highly *blameable*; but) for his *policy*, because he had done *wisely*, that is, in regard to his worldly interest; in having such a *forecast*, and taking such care for himself, he had done *wisely*, that is, *discreetly*, according to
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the wisdom of this world, whose concern is only for the good things of this life; and his *lord commended him*, as we may do, when we say, such a one “is a *cunning, politic* man for the world; he understands “well the way of dealing in it, &c.” He is here commended therefore, and proposed, *not absolutely*, as a fit example of our imitation, but *comparatively*, in *this respect* only to be imitated, that we would take care in time, as he did, to *make ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*, that is, the vain, transitory riches, &c. that *when they fail, we may be received into everlasting habitations.*

From which behaviour, our Lord takes occasion to draw this inference: *For the children of this world are wiser in their, &c.*

By the children of this world, are understood *worldly men*; that mind only the things of this world; and by the children of light, are meant, the *professors* of religion, such as pretend to *know* more, to believe and hope for much *higher* happiness, than this world can afford; and yet the former of these, our Saviour tells us, *are wiser in their generation*, in their way, than the others. The generality of Christians are not so wise and provident for the welfare of their immortal souls, as worldly men for the interests of the present life; they who make the enjoyments of this world the end of all

all their labours and pursuits, do commonly act with more policy, in relation to their worldly concerns, than those, who profess to have higher expectations, do in regard to their spiritual affairs, which best deserve their most active industry and application, and will require all their *prudence* and *wisdom* to manage.

A very *severe rebuke*, this, and a *sad reflection* on the children of light, and what we cannot but think a great shame and reproach to us: That we, who pretend to be influenced by the *noblest* principles of the best religion in the world, with the sure *hopes of immortality*, should shew less prudence and industry in the pursuit of such views, than the men of this world do, in the acquisition of *vain and transitory* enjoyments; that these should be so active and provident, for a mean subsistence upon earth, and we so indifferent and supine, so remiss and inconsiderate in the securing an inheritance truly great in heaven. And yet thus we find it is in *fact*, and on this is grounded the observation in the text, *For the children of this world are wiser*, &c. But for the more distinct illustration of this passage, it will be necessary,

- I. To enquire, for what particular reasons, our blessed Lord may be supposed to have uttered this so severe a sentence,

tence, *The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.*

II. What probably may be the *causes* of that so great and lamentable *folly*, in the children of light, which gave occasion to it. After which, I shall conclude with some brief admonitions from the whole. And,

I. As to the *reasons* that might induce our Saviour to pronounce so severe a *censure* on such as call themselves children of light, it requires *little* study to find out these; we need look no further than the parable before us. This steward, it is true, was *unjust* and false to his master, he had no regard at all to common honesty or justice; but this we are not to wonder at, for he was a child of this world, had nothing in view but his worldly interest, and cared not what methods he took to advance *this*; and if we consider him under this notion only, as our Saviour does, and as the scope of the parable requires we should, his example will furnish us with too many instances of prudence, which *the children of light* are too often grossly *defective* in. For,

Observe, 1st, His *timely forecast*, in providing for his future well-being. No sooner did he know his master's resolution, to dismiss

miss him his service, but he immediately began to think how to repair this loss. *My lord taketh, &c. What then shall I do?* Some way or other must be thought of, some thing must be done, to keep me from want and poverty the remainder of my life. And here he soon perceived, at first view, that he who had lived so long an easy life, and bore a reputable post in his lord's service, could not propose any great benefit by *hard labour*, to which he had been utterly unaccustomed; much less by *begging*, of which he was as much ashamed. Besides, he was willing to secure himself a *better*, and more ample provision, than he could probably expect by either of these methods; and thereupon, without being discouraged at the *difficulty* of his circumstances, he resolves upon another course, which might better answer his desires, and endeavours to make such a lasting friendship with his lord's debtors, as might oblige them to shew him kindness, when he should come to want their assistance.

And having thus formed his design, and laid out his scheme, he immediately falls to work upon it; he does not let it lie long in idle speculation, as knowing that resolving without executing would never bring about his ends. And what could have been more prudent in his way, that is, upon his supposition and principles, than such a behaviour?

viour? For it be natural for men to desire happiness, and as great a degree of it too, as they can possibly obtain, and to be uneasy till they have got some rational hopes of obtaining it, What is more commendable, in this case, than an immediate application to the business? Who would trifle away time, when his best interest is at stake? Or when shall it be thought wisdom to exert our utmost skill and courage, if not *then*, when we are providing ourselves a comfortable supply, as lasting and extensive as our beings?

Had he been negligent in performing his resolution, or put it off from day to day, it is probable his whole design would have been blasted, and all his measures broken: For what signifies all the forethought and contrivance in the world, without a dextrous and diligent application of the means proper for the attainment of our ends? Had he been defective here, or omitted the execution of his purpose for ever so little a time, he might have lost all: but he not only *resolved*, he put his resolution immediately into practice, he applied himself in earnest to find out the means, that might bring about his design, and pursued those means that appeared most likely to accomplish it.

And does not this shew, how much wiser he was in his way, than many of the children of light? For, alas! how little of this
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providence and *forecast* do we discern among the professors of religion, in the management of their spiritual concerns? How few that reflect so *seriously*, or so frequently, as they ought, *upon what is to come?* tho' we all pretend to believe a future state, and that it is our principal business here to prepare for it; yet, how few have the wisdom to consider with this provident steward, *What shall I do, when my lord taketh from me, &c.*

We all know, and are assured, that our Lord will take from us the stewardship, that we must resign our lives and beings into his hands, and that too in a very little time, when we must give account of our present conduct and administration; yet, how few live as if they had any thing to account for! How few live like those, who know they must die, or rather, live after death, in happiness or misery to all eternity!

How little care do they take to secure their interest in another world, and lay up such a treasure in heaven, as will endure as long as their beings! When yet they confess, this must be done *now* in the present life, or they are miserable, and undone for ever.

And if there be found some religious persons, as no doubt there are many, who do sincerely believe and hope for the enjoyment of future happiness, and have formed good resolutions in their heads; yet, how few
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among these set their hearts and hands effectually to the *work*! How little thought do even such as these take to turn their resolutions into practice, with that zeal and expedition which is necessary for the attainment of it! How apt to be discouraged by any seeming difficulty in the way! How easily prevailed upon to *procrastinate* and defer the execution of their good purposes, from one day to another! How many seem to think any other time might serve as well as the present, to make preparations for eternity; and are ready to chuse any other means, rather than those which are most fit and necessary! The *future* time, which is absolutely out of our power, and to us a thing of the greatest uncertainty, is too often reserved for this momentous affair; and all other methods shall be sooner tried for the attainment of our end, than that which is most proper, and without which, we are assured, it will be impossible to obtain it, *Holiness in all manner of conversation*. And then, upon the sight of the cross, or the least trial or affliction in the way, how ready are they to *droop*, and desist from their good resolutions! How willing to persuade themselves, that all their cares and pains will be to no purpose! And so chuse to lie down in sloth and ease, and abandon the hopes of heaven, rather than strive to *enter in at the strait gate*. And what is yet more foolish,

foolish, if possible, and yet too frequent among the *children of light*, is when they make needless delays, when they put off the securing their happiness, till it is too late, till all time and opportunity is *snatched* out of their hands. O! how much wiser would it be, not only to *resolve* upon, but immediately to apply ourselves to, the *great work* of salvation; and when we *know* the way and means how to do it, to put our designs speedily in execution, and pursue them with industry, till we have attained some good hopes and assurance of success! And,

To this end, there is another particular instance of prudence, to be considered in the conduct of this steward, which will much contribute to the attainment of our hopes; and that is, *2dly*, His discreet management of what he had *unjustly* gotten, and *disposing* of it in such a manner, as might be, *according to his principle*, of the *greatest* benefit and advantage to him. I say, *according to his principle*; for though he was mistaken, both as to the real *object* of his happiness, and the extent of his being, yet upon his supposition, upon his mistaken notion, that the whole happiness of his being *terminated* in the good things of this world, he could not have taken a *wiser method*, of having a *competent share* of them at his command. For having now, by a *fraudulent combination* with his lord's debtors,

tors, a considerable sum of money at his disposal, he does not lay it out upon trifles, does not spend it all *at once in rioting and luxury, feasting* to day, and starving to *morrow*; but so disposed of it, as to make it become a security for a sufficient maintenance during his whole life. He bestowed it among those, who, when he was turned out of his office, would receive him into their houses, and entertain him whilst he lived, as one of their own family.

And can the riches of this world be applied to better interest, than to the purchasing *everlasting habitations*? What wiser way can a man employ his wealth, than to secure himself thereby *everlasting friends*? It is true, if *unjustly* gotten, it ought to be returned to the right *owner*; satisfaction must be done, and reparation made, if possible, to all that we have injured or defrauded; for there can be no peace, no felicity, no *self-enjoyment* to the thief or the robber. It is impossible for a man, that is conscious of having done injustice to others, ever to take any *pleasure* or satisfaction in himself or his possessions; and it would be better for such a one, to surrender up all he has in the world, for the sake of doing justice to his neighbour, than *detain* the least mite that does not belong to him. *Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his ways,*

tho' he be rich. An honest man, tho' clothed in rags, is *happier* and more at ease in mind, wherein consists the true happiness of man, than he that shines in purple, with a soul stained by fraud and oppression. Better therefore, no doubt, and wiser had it been, for this *unfaithful servant* to have done justice, to have made *satisfaction* to his master, and thrown himself entirely upon the mercy of providence, than take such a course as he did, to live in plenty, with contempt, disgrace and infamy. But this he was not *wise* enough to foresee or understand; he looked upon *honesty* as an *empty* name, he preferred what *seemed* profitable, before what was really *just*. Whereas, indeed, nothing can be truly *profitable*, that is not *just*. However, still, he may be said to have acted wisely, that is, *consistently with his principles*; and so far is he proposed as a pattern for *wiser* men: *I say unto you,* says Christ, *Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, ye may, &c.* The common way to do so, is thought generally to be by works of *piety* and *charity*. But *justice* must *first* be done; this is a duty *prior* to all others, and if wealth has been acquired by *injustice*, satisfaction must be *first* made to the injured, if that be possible, before God will accept any thing from us. What signifies an *alms* to the poor, or an offering to God, if it comes

comes from a man that lives by *rapine* and oppression? Indeed, where *justice* cannot be done to every suffering *individual*, there, the best way to *make reparation* may be, by offering it up to God, and the poor, by surrendering up to the publick, what is not properly our *own*, but has been plundered from it: This is the *only possible way*, to make *peace* and satisfaction in our own minds, and make to ourselves friends, of God and the blessed angels above. This is *the only way to undo what we have done*, to make our *own consciences* our friends, that they may not reproach and torment us; and to make the poor our friends, that by their prayers to God, they may procure his favour for us; that, when we fail, we may be received into everlasting habitations. *Fail we must*, death will soon overtake the most healthy among us: In this sense then, the most thriving tradesman must fail one time or other; and a miserable bankrupt will he be, if he has not taken this way, to secure himself friends against a time of need.

But here, again, how few among the children of light, are observed to act *consistently* with such *principles* as these, which are confessedly the principles of all *sober* and good men! How little care is taken, to be *just* and honest, as well as charitable; whereas, *justice* is certainly to be *preferred*, and should go before all other virtues! This is the *foun-*

dation of all *morality*, and without this, no other *virtues* will be of any service, for they are all *lies* and *hypocrisy*: Without justice, charity becomes *ostentation*, and piety a *mockery* of God. But, when we are thoroughly satisfied we have done justly, have been faithful and upright in all our dealings, have acquired the substance that God has blessed us with, in the way of an *honest industry*; *then* may we chearfully go on to *do good*, and to shew mercy to the poor and indigent; *then we ought to be so wise*, as to communicate to the wants of our fellow creatures; not hoard up our talent for *ourselves* only, or *squander* it away upon sin and folly; but give *liberally*, as God has given to us, and so lay up a good foundation against the time to come, that we may attain eternal life.

S E R M O N V.

The U N J U S T S T E W A R D.

P A R T II.

L U K E xvi. 8.

— *For the children of this world are wiser in their generation, than the children of light.*

I N my last discourse, I considered in what sense, and upon what accounts, the *children of this world*, that is, worldly men, are here pronounced by our Saviour, to be wiser in their generation than the children of light, that is, the professors of religion, who pretend to higher degrees of *knowledge*, and to be governed by a principle of piety and virtue. They are wiser in their generation, that is, in their *way*; they *manage better*, and with more

prudence, in the acquisition of riches, honours, and pleasures of this world, wherein, according to their principle, consists their only happiness, than the children of light do, in respect to their future expectations, those spiritual entertainments of heaven, which yet, they believe, are infinitely *more worthy* their pursuit. A reflection, which, how severe soever it may appear, is yet *every day verified* in the behaviour of worldly men, who stick at no pains to promote their worldly views, and are generally more ingenious and industrious for this vain world, than the children of light, for that which is *eternal*; they set their heads, their hands, their hearts to work, *rise early*, and *late take rest*: When poverty is coming, and they are likely to be removed from their stewardship, they soon resolve what to do, like this *politic steward* in the parable, and execute their resolution as soon; whilst the other appear as indifferent about futurity, as if nothing could *happen amiss*; or, if they do resolve sometimes to make some provision for it, they pursue their resolutions so coldly, as if it were an equal thing to them, whether they were happy or miserable to all eternity. The men of this world are circumspect and sagacious in *foreseeing*, and as artful and indefatigable in *preventing* any temporal inconvenience, that may obstruct their views; while the other fall voluntarily into danger,
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never think of the secret snares of sin, till they are actually entangled, and are *not afraid*, where they have the greatest reason to fear. The men of this world *labour*, in the highest sense of the word, *for the meat that perisheth*, for the bread of sorrow; while the other think to be fed by *miracle*, as if the heavenly manna would *now*, as it did in the days of the *Israelites*, without any more ado, drop from heaven into their mouths.

It is, indeed, very surprising to find so strong a propension in good men to loath their best food, that they should be so apt to grow weary of the most *sublime* satisfaction of human nature; and which, the more they enjoy them, become the more delightful and entertaining; while others are so extremely fond of worldly pleasures, though they are found by him, that has the most of them, to be but *vanity* and *vexation*: Yet *thus* it is, and thus it too plainly appears to be, from the different management and conduct of these two sorts of men, in the gaining their respective ends; and while the children of this world are wise in their way, in the pursuits of folly, the children of light behave like fools in the persecution of true wisdom. How it comes to be so, I now proceed, in the

II^d Place, to enquire; where I shall endeavour to lay before you, what, may be supposed to be the *causes* of this great folly

and misconduct in the children of light that they may know how to mend it for the time to come. And here I shall mention the three following :

I. The corruption or depravity of human nature.

II. The suitableness or agreeableness of the things of this world, to the inclinations of mankind.

III. The prevailing power of custom and example. And,

I. One of the chief causes of this folly, I conceive, must proceed from ourselves, from the corruption and depravity of human nature. For, whatever some may imagine, as if we were all as *sound* and perfect, as when we first came out of the hands of God; this seems contrary to the truth, contrary to common experience, and observation. The soul itself *seems* to *complain* of some *defect* and *apostasy* from God; it finds the affections earthly and *sensual*, and the *will*, instead of submitting chearfully to the dictates of right reason and virtue, inclined rather to follow the carnal baits of passion and appetite; as if the curse of God upon that old serpent, who beguiled our first parents by the allurements of sense, had been propagated down to all their posterity, who have
loved

loved ever since to be *creeping* on the earth, like him, and *eating of the dust of the ground*. And if reason and conscience do at any time expostulate with us, and endeavour to check the course of our evil affections, this, we find, raises a civil war in our souls, *the flesh against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh*; we have a law * in our members, as the apostle speaks, *warring against the law of our mind*; and what is worse, *bringing us into captivity to the law of sin*, Rom. vii. 23.

And, God knows, this is too often the *sad event* of this spiritual war within us: For the greatest part of mankind being *lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*, will sooner suffer themselves to be carried away with the *torrent*, than endure the trouble and fatigue of opposing it; rather than bear the hazards and distress of a *siege*, they chuse to *surrender* on the first assault; which is very chearfully done, you must imagine, by such as are *well affected* to the enemy, who harbour a *traitor* in their own bosom, which is continually persuading them to prefer their ease and pleasure to a *hard*, laborious virtue, and that they ought to follow *that* with the greatest industry, which they have the strongest *desire* and inclination to enjoy.

The best man amongst us, if he considers himself, will be sensible of a contradiction from with-

* Something that has the force of governing and influencing our actions.

within, a diversity from himself, that he is not all of a piece, nor has the power over his apprehensions: *That which is born after the flesh, will persecute that which is born after the spirit.* The temper and infirmities of body make it hard sometimes to exercise our reason and understanding: In this *earthly tabernacle we groan, as being burdened,* are often hindered in the operations of the mind, and beaten off from our best resolutions: *For the corruptible body presseth down the soul,* and is a clog and incumbrance in its *flight* towards God. And then,

II. The things of this world are *more suitable* to our corrupt inclinations, they are more agreeable to our taste, not only as they better *please the sensual* part of us, but also as being *visible* and *present*; whereas those of the other are *invisible* and *future*.

What we have before our eyes and daily converse with, is more apt to engage our affection and *engross* our hearts, than things that are *out of sight* and at a distance; and this is another reason of the imprudent management in the children of light. For though the things they pursue, I mean, the rewards of another world, do infinitely *exceed* all the entertainments of this, in every quality that can render any thing excellent and amiable, as being more perfect, unmixed, and of eternal duration; yet, what is *out of sight*, is for that reason often *out of their mind,*

mind, and they are apt to *forget* the things they never *see*, at least the thoughts of them make but light impressions on the mind; this world being so *near* to, so *obsequious*, so *officious* about us, that it justles out the other, before we can seriously weigh the proposals of both in the balance of sober reason. Most men like beasts, are governed chiefly by their *senses*; they judge of things by the out-side and appearance; and, for a morsel of meat to satisfy their present hunger, are fools enough to sell an eternal inheritance. Nay, even wise and good men are too apt to be struck with the *pomp* and *splendor* of the world, and gaze so long on the false beauty of the forbidden fruit, as to let it steal away their hearts, against all the arguments of conscience and religion, and make them despise the curse that attends the eating of it. And thus, while men suffer themselves to be enticed by the allurements of sensual pleasure, to exercise their thoughts upon the pursuit of this, they become deaf to the charms of a spiritual life; they contract, by degrees, an *intimacy* and familiarity with the world; which takes them off from their acquaintance with God, and the concerns of a future state.

III. *Lastly*, The last reason I mentioned, of this unhappy conduct in the children of light, is, because men are more inclined to be governed by *custom* and *example*,

ple, than by the true *reason* and *nature* of things. Common custom and example carries a general and prevailing *influence* over the tempers and manners, and even the very sentiments of men's minds. And if we survey the behaviour of many *good men*, we shall find them oftentimes conforming too much to the general vogue and current of the world, and steering their conversation and practice with too careful an eye to the mode and fashion of the times.

Good men love to be good-natured, obliging and complaisant, and would willingly recommend themselves to the consciences and good liking of men, as well as to the approbation of Almighty God; and, tho' this be what they are chiefly solicitous about, yet they cannot but desire likewise, that men should be pleased with their conduct, esteem them for their good works, and give glory to God for them. And this is what often draws them into a compliance with the humours and taste of the age, into a relaxation and remission of their zeal, if not into lukewarmness and indifference about matters of the utmost importance. This makes them oftentimes too busy about the things, which they see others have so *much at heart*, and forgetful of, or inattentive to, what they see so *little* regarded. For alas! this world, we find, is the general mark and aim, to which most men direct their views;

views; the *wisdom of this world*, is that wisdom which is chiefly cried up and universally pursued. *Secular policy*, or the dextrous art of engrossing as much of this world, as we possibly can, is every day applauded and admired, as the *master-piece* of wisdom. Whereas the *wisdom that is from above*, the practice of virtue and honesty, and the care of the soul, is despised and set at nought, as our Saviour was by the soldiers, spit upon and derided: Piety, and meekness, and the sense of God, shall be esteemed the signs of a mean soul, when the impious and profane shall pass for a *wit*; a man of justice and integrity, and who is afraid of doing any thing that is hurtful or injurious to others, shall be looked upon as a person of a *narrow genius*; when he that knows how to flatter and dissemble, to cheat and defraud, and over-reach his neighbour, shall be carested as an *artful* and *ingenious* person, fit to be *employed* and *promoted* to the highest stations in life. Thus goes the world: And therefore, if men would not be *singular*, (which is but the way to be despised indeed) they must do as others do; they must be wise for earth, and not for heaven; they must strive to grow rich and get estates; they must spend their time and thoughts in raising their fortunes and their families, not in the *obsolete* duties of devotion, humility and self-denial.

If

If a man would *rise*, he must study the tempers, and conform to the principles of such as are in a *condition* to advance him. If *Balaam*, out of a conscientious scruple, refuse to curse the *Israelites*, he shall lose the blessing of the king, and be dismissed with a frown; *I thought to promote thee to great honour, but lo! the Lord hath kept thee back, &c.* Truth and plain dealing shall put a stop to his preferment; but, if he desire to dwell in king's houses, he must learn to make his conscience easy and complaisant, pliant and conformable, and distinguish himself by the *smoothness* of his speech as well as *softness of his raiment*. This, I say, he must do, if he would be in the *fashion*, or make himself fit to be taken notice of; he must swim with the stream, and conform to the customs of the age, and not confine himself so closely to the rules of the gospel.

And truly, thus we find the generality of men inclined to do; and, as long as they do so, as long as they seek the praise of men more than the praise of God; take more care to stand fair in the *opinions*, in the mistaken *notions* of men, than in God's *unerring* judgment (by which notwithstanding they must eternally stand or fall) no wonder if they are better servants of *mammon* than of God, and more skilled in the acquisition of gain than the practice of godliness. And thus have I taken the liberty of just mention-
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ing to you some of the unhappy causes of that *absurd*, thoughtless, and inconsistent behaviour, too visible in the *votaries* of religion, and for which they are here so severely censured by our Saviour.

Such is the inherent depravity of human nature, that we are carried away with ease to the *pursuit* of *evil*, but are brought with much *difficulty* to the love and *practice* of virtue. Men are naturally inclined to be fond of such objects as *gratify* the senses; and, as for *spiritual*, *intellectual* entertainments, they are *despised*, because not understood. The good things of this world are *visible* and *near*, we know and we see what they are; but the promised rewards of virtue are out of sight and at a distance; they are something we *cannot fully comprehend* at present, and this, with many, takes off from the weight and value of them. And then, as we have observed further, how strongly are most people bent to follow a *prevailing custom*, and strike in with the example of the age, be it ever so evil and corrupt! The generality of men are governed by their senses, and tempted to do as they see others do before them. They do not love to be *singular*, though it be in the best of causes, for fear of being mocked at and ridiculed; and therefore chuse to be in the fashion, and follow the multitude, tho' the paths they walk in lead down to the *chambers of hell*.

But

But here let me add one word, before I conclude this discourse, by way of admonition to such as are called *children of light*, and who profess to govern themselves by the *clear light* and *knowledge* they receive from the gospel: Let them *consider*, that none of *these* pleas, no such excuses as these. will be a sufficient justification of our conduct at the last great day of enquiry.

We must not think to lay the fault of, our wilful *negligence* and mismanagement on the *depravity* of nature, the violence of temptation, the craft and policy of Satan, or that we only did as we saw others do before us. When we come to give up our accounts to the great Judge, the sovereign Lord of the world, whose eye can discern the most private recesses of the soul, none of these pretences will stand us in any stead; nor can we in our conscience think they will be sufficient to excuse us: For God hath promised to give us grace and strength, sufficient to *subdue* the corruptions of nature, and overcome the temptations of the world, the flesh, or the devil: he has expressly forbid us to be conformed to this world: The Christian religion, obliges all its professors to *renounce* all the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, to keep themselves *unspotted*, chaste, and pure, in thought, word, and deed. Every one that nameth the name of
Christ,

Christ, is required to *depart from all iniquity, and avoid the very appearance of evil*: These are the *terms* on which we *now stand*, these the *unalterable conditions* of the new covenant between God and us; and if we hope to be acquitted at the day of trial, or received into everlasting mansions of bliss, we must give all *diligence to make our calling and election sure, by working out our salvation with fear and trembling.*

To this end, we are taught to pray, in that excellent collect of the church, with which I shall conclude: *Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of thy good name, encrease in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

S E R M O N VI.

The U N J U S T S T E W A R D.

P A R T III.

L U K E xvi. 8.

— *For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*

TH E S E words contain a proposition, which, we must own, bears hard upon such as are called the *children* of light, that is, the professors of religion: The children of this world, says Christ, that is, worldly men, who have nothing else in view, but the good things of this life, are wiser in their way; that is, they manage better, they act with a greater *fore-thought* and prudence, in the acquisition

sition of worldly wealth, than the others do in regard to future glory and the spiritual enjoyments of heaven. This has been proved from several instances, mentioned in the parable, to which the text is an application; and, I have farther laid before you, the *causes* of this sad mismanagement in the children of light; that they may know how to *mend* it for the time to come.

III. I now proceed, in the third and last place, to shut up the whole, by *drawing some proper admonitions and instructions* from what has been said. And *here*, lest the children of this world should be *puffed up* with what is here said in their commendation, and grow *wise in their own conceits*, or imagine themselves truly *wise*, because they are said to be wiser in their way than the children of light; I would beg leave to put them in mind, that, notwithstanding what is here said of their *wisdom*, they have little cause to boast of it; when all their *wisdom*, at best, is really no better than the most *egregious folly*. For,

I. If we consider things rightly, it is plain, they are *utterly mistaken* in one of the most material and principal points of wisdom; which is, to fix on the best and most worthy end. Every *rational* agent must propose some *end* or other in all his actions; and that, which intends the most *excellent*,

must act most agreeably to the dictates of wisdom: He therefore, that, when it is in his power to obtain the best and supreme good, pursues what is subordinate and vastly *inferior*, can never be thought to manage like a wise man. Now, it is certain, there can be no proportion betwixt the sublime transcendent happiness of heaven, and those low and languid enjoyments we meet with here upon earth; finite and infinite can admit of no comparison; and consequently, he that prefers a few short and empty pleasures, to everlasting bliss, must be looked upon to have made a very *weak* and *imprudent* choice, and deserves a character very different from that of a wise or discreet man. It was an excellent reply of a good old hermit, to a profligate libertine, who, seeing him walk about, half naked and starved, said to him in a jeering way, Father, your condition is very bad, if there be not another life: True, son, replied the other; but what is like to be thy condition, if there be? Worldly men think themselves very happy in this life, and very wise in pursuing the pleasures of it; and so, perhaps, they might be, was there no future state: But what will be their fate, if *there be*?

Now we have very strong *presumptions*, and good moral *assurances* from reason, to believe there will be another life; and according to divine revelation, we have no less

less than *infallible certainty* of it. If then, it should prove true, (as I do not question but will at last) that man was a creature designed for two different states of being, that is, for two different lives, the question will be, which of these two it is our wisdom to make ourselves *happy* in? This, we see, is very short and uncertain; the other is immortal and eternal: Which then would be the wisest choice in this case? To take up with the pleasures of a life transient and precarious, and at best of a very short duration; or to secure ourselves the satisfactions of a life fixed, certain, and what is never to end?

This now, I think, brings the debate to a short issue, and every man, upon very little consideration, may determine which to chuse. But the great misfortune is, though we know our interest ever so well, in our lives and actions we run counter to it; and most men, like true children of this world, labour to make provision for the present life, as if it were never to have an end; and take as little thought for the other, as if it were never to have a beginning.

But what terms of reproach are sufficient to express the folly and madness of such men, who lay out all their pains and time for a life that can last but threescore and ten years, and make no manner of preparation for that which must last for ever,

and, after as many thousands of years, will be still new and but beginning! Nothing surely can be a greater disgrace to an intelligent being, or a more palpable contradiction to common sense, than such a behaviour as this; especially, if we consider, that our best laid projects and contrivances for the acquisition of worldly wealth, may prove *fruitless* and *unsuccessful*; and, after all our endeavours, we may be as far to seek as ever. If we trust to this world for our happiness, it is *possible* we *may*, nay, it is very *probable* we shall, be deceived and disappointed in our views; and, it is *certain*, after all the success we can desire, we shall never find that exquisite *felicity* and *content* we expect in it. Whereas, on the other hand, if we sincerely endeavour to be happy with God in another life, and follow the means he has proposed for the attainment of it, we cannot fail of success; it is impossible we should be deceived in our hopes or our expectations from them. For, as God is true, so certain is it, that he will faithfully reward all *those that diligently seek him*.

'Tis true, it may be said, the next life is a life in *reversion*, and seems at *some distance* from us; and this is one reason, why it is so little thought of: But, it is a very *fallacious* one, and is founded on a wrong supposition; for, we know not *how near* we are to it; it is certain, we cannot be far off,
and

and we may enter upon it the next moment, for any thing we know to the contrary. And now then, we will put the case at the worst: Which would a wise man chuse, a life of seventy years of pleasure, and then to be miserable for ever; or, to be *miserable* for that period of time, perhaps indeed it may not be quite so long, and then to be *happy* for ever? You must observe I here suppose, that a virtuous life makes men miserable; which seems to be the opinion of worldly men; and that a wicked life is a happy life: But the contrary to this is the truth; a virtuous life is really the only happy life, and he that lives in sinful pleasures must *naturally* and necessarily be miserable.

And what then can be more surprising than the stupidity of those men, who make so absurd a choice, who prefer the *joy* of a moment, with everlasting misery at the end of it, to the suffering a few bodily inconveniencies for a little time, which will be succeeded with eternal glory!

Let worldly men therefore *boast* of their deep policy and cunning, if they can; but common prudence, I think, will teach us a quite different way of thinking; this will direct us to consider the present life only as it may conduce to the happiness of the next, and chearfully to renounce the fleeting

pleasures of a few years, for the more substantial joys of an endless eternity. But,

2. Let the children of this world examine their conduct once more, not only in preferring things temporal to eternal, but also in that desperate hazard they run, as to their *immortal* souls; which while they are too solicitous about small matters, they must necessarily *neglect* to provide for, and be in great danger of losing for ever.

And, what an irreparable *loss* will that be! If the soul of a wicked man should survive the body, and be called to receive its sentence according to the things done in the body, is it not *condemned* and lost for ever? Not so *lost*, perhaps, as to drop out of being; that might be *well* for them; but *lost* from all hopes of happiness, *lost* in endless woe. And, what *can it profit a man, if he could gain the whole world, and thus lose his own soul?*

What mighty advantage then do the men of this world reap from all their sagacity and success, if after all their *acquisitions* here, they must be forced to *want* every thing hereafter; and, when they come to die, must lose not only their present gains, but their souls and themselves for ever!

So that, if we survey the children of this world, in their best colours, they are no better than *wise fools*; a character, I presume, they

they will not be very proud of. They are very wise and politic in catching at a *shadow*, and *losing* the substance: They industriously apply themselves to those things which are but *vanity*; and, in the mean time, forsake the paths that would lead them to substantial felicity; such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and is too great for the heart of man to conceive. Nay, they oftentimes take *more pains* to get a small estate upon earth, than would have procured them, if rightly laid out, the possession of an eternal inheritance in heaven. In a word, they are wise indeed, for the contriving and effecting their own ruin; they are *ingenious* to their own destruction; and, to speak the best of them, they are *wise* for this life, but *fools* for the next; wise for a *day*, and fools to *eternity*.

God forbid, therefore, that any of those that are called children of light should imitate this wisdom, or *affect* to be esteemed wise on such conditions as these. Rather, let us all endeavour henceforth, to prosecute the *true wisdom*, with that *zeal* and *industry* it deserves; and no longer suffer the children of this world, who are no better than fools, to come in competition with, or be preferred, for any part of wisdom, before the children of light, And this is the

3^d. And last inference or instruction, I would draw from the text, and wherewith I shall conclude *the whole* of what has been delivered on this subject: It has been already observed, how much we, the *children of light*, have the advantage over the children of this world, in regard to the *end* we propose; their happiness is but empty and imaginary, ours solid and real; theirs is frail and perishing, ours *incorruptible, that never fades away*; all their expectations terminate in the present short life, ours *reach forward* to eternity.

Let us consider then, what a grievous shame and reproach it will be to us, when we have so noble an end, so excellent a reward in view, that we should pursue it with less *vigour*, with less courage and alacrity, than the children of this world do things infinitely *less worth*; things, indeed, *mean and vile*, and beneath the dignity and concern of man. We cannot but be sensible, that it is an essential point of wisdom, to proportion our care and esteem for things, to the true *worth* and value of them; and since we are firmly persuaded, that the happiness of heaven is infinitely more excellent than all the delights of this life put together, *why* will we be guilty of such an inconsistency, so pernicious an absurdity, as to be remiss and slothful in that, which we
acknow-

acknowledge of all other affairs best deserves and requires our utmost diligence, and most intense application?

I confess, while we *live* in this world, while we carry these bodies of flesh about us, or have families and children to take care for, it is fit and necessary, we should make some provision for these, and take some *thought* for the supply of the *wants* and necessities of human nature. *Industry* in our several callings, *frugality*, temperance, and *good œconomy* in our expences, are all *necessary* and *commendable* duties; and, these do not *exclude*, nor *need they take* us off from, the thoughts of futurity. A man may follow the business of his trade or profession here *below*, with the most industrious application, and have his mind and conversation *above* at the same time; and, I will venture to say, he makes the best preparation for another world, and is most likely to see the face of God in heaven, who takes the most care to discharge the duties of the *station*, God has placed him in upon earth. I am far from condemning, therefore, a *moderate* enjoyment of the good things of this life, or a proper care and provision of present conveniences, by a *close* and *active diligence* in business, when I am pressing the *care* of the soul, and a concern about futurity. Nor do I see any *contrariety* or *opposition* between these two duties;

duties; *they rather help forward and promote each other*; we may certainly *use* this world, so as not to abuse it; we may take some thought for the things of this life, without transgressing our Saviour's command, provided, *we seek first, that is, chiefly, the kingdom of God and his righteousness.* All that I contend for is, that we should not make this world our *ultimate end*, or pursue the blessings of it with as *much anxiety and solicitude* of mind, as if we thought them *preferable*, or at least equal, to the joys we hope for hereafter. This, I am sure, can never be the opinion of such as are true children of light, or believe the glorious revelation of the gospel of Christ; and yet, if we were to judge by the behaviour and actions of many, who are no bad Christians neither, one would be apt to think they had, sometimes, some *secret doubts and suspicions* about it.

But then, let it be remembered still, what a sad reproach and infamy it will be upon us, should these things prove true and real; to be seduced and cheated with *our eyes open*, in direct opposition both to reason and faith; to chuse what we know to be trifles and vanities, before true happiness; to *embrace* death and misery, before life and immortality. Let us therefore learn, for the future, to fortify ourselves against the *insinuations*

sinuations of vice, and despise the fashions of a licentious world; dare to be wise and happy in another life, though we should be singular in this. Let us *strive to enter in at the strait gate*, and boldly press forward in the narrow path to heaven, though we have but few companions by the way: Nay, though we should be *accounted fools* for our pains, should be insulted, reviled, and persecuted, and men should say all manner of evil against us, (for our holding fast only to that which is good) yet, we have no reason to be discouraged, because we know, that *greater will be our reward in heaven*, Matt. v. 11. Let us then be no longer *diffident* in our minds, *inconstant* in our resolutions, halting between two opinions, and dividing our hearts between God and *mammon*. But let them be fixed there, where our treasure is, and where alone true joys are to be found. In a word, let it be our principal care and concern to *walk as children of light*, and give all diligence to make our calling and election sure; and let the shortness and uncertainty of the time allotted for this work, make us the more solicitous in the prosecution of it, that we may see it *perfected* and finished before *the night cometh, when no man can work*; that whenever our great master cometh, we may be able to give up our accounts with joy, and be *received*
by

by our friends above into everlasting habitations, &c.

In the mean time, I cannot help observing, that the assertion of our Lord in this text, was never more lamentably verified, than in the Christians of the present age: Profaneness, immorality, an indifference to, and contempt of religion, was never more predominant than at present; and they who put on a form and appearance of religion, seem to have little more than the mere *form*, and know little of the power and efficacy of it; their thoughts, their cares and desires, turn chiefly on the present world, and their souls lie neglected as if beneath their concern.

But, surely, the apostles and primitive Christians had other apprehensions of these things; they *despised* the world as it deserved; they saw, it consisted of things transitory and vain, and placed their hearts and affections on those things, which, though *invisible*, are yet *eternal*. A worthy example of which, we see in the apostle of this day; St. *James*, who, upon the call of Christ, *left his father and all that he had, and followed him without delay and hesitation*, as believing it was in his power, to make him ample amends for all he could *lose or suffer* in this world.

May

The UNJUST STEWARD. 95

May the same mind be in every one of us, that forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, we may be always ready to obey him in all things, and follow his holy commandment, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON

S E R M O N VII.

*The PRIVILEGE of being the SONS
of GOD.*

I J O H N iii. 1.

*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath
bestowed upon us, that we should be called
the sons of God!—*

I N the latter part of the foregoing chapter, the apostle is exhorting his Christian converts, whom he speaks to under the endearing appellation of *children*, to persevere in the true faith and love of God, *ver. 28.* and, by way of motive to induce them hereto, he puts them in mind of the *righteousness* or justice of God, and their own near *relation* to him. *If ye know that God is righteous, ver. 29. ye know that*

that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him, that is, every such person is become the son or child of God, who is faithful and just not only to forgive the sins, but reward the sincere obedience, of his children.

After the mention of which *glorious relation*, he breaks out, in a kind of *extacy* and transport, into this reflection: *Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed, &c.*

What an *unspeakable* honour, what *immense* love was this, that God should *adopt* us for his children! that we should be *called*, that is, should be made the *sons of God*! *Behold!* a note that, like a star set before matters of weight, signifies the grandeur and importance of a thing; to shew, it is something new and surprising, and worthy to invite and command our most serious and devout attention.

In the following discourse then, I shall enquire,

I. Into the true meaning and importance of this expression, when we are called the *sons of God*.

II. What an *inestimable* honour and blessing it is, and how great an instance of God's infinite love towards us. And,

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III. *Lastly,*

III. *Lastly*, How we ought to behave ourselves, if we would live and act agreeably to this glorious *title* and *relation*.

I. What is to be understood, by being a son or child of God? This expression has several acceptations in holy Scripture.

1. In the most proper and natural sense, it signifies that *eternal son* of God, begotten by the Father before all worlds; who is therefore stiled, by way of eminence, the *Son*, and the only begotten Son of God.

2. There are those who are called sons of God by a *temporal creation*; such are all rational creatures, both angels and men, which are called sons of God, as he is their Father and creator, from whom they derive their being. *Job* i. 6. *Luke* iii. 38. so in *Daniel*, *The form of the fourth was like a Son of God*, that is, an angel.

3. Some again are called sons of God by a *spiritual regeneration*, by being renewed in the spirit of their minds, as St. Paul has expressed it, and created in righteousness and true holiness, *Eph.* iv. 23, 24. These are they, who have put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man; that is, their old corrupt nature; and have put on the new man, which

which is *created in righteousness and true holiness*; such as are not only born of water and the holy spirit, that is, baptized into the faith of Jesus Christ, but are actually *born of God, sanctified* by the spirit, and *sealed* to the day of redemption.

Their natures and dispositions are so altered, and they are so absolutely *unlike* what they were *before*, that they are *changed*, as it were, into *new creatures*; are now become lovers of God and virtue, as they were before the slaves of vice and folly.

And such a spiritual change as this, is what justly gives us that honourable title of being sons of God; *As many as are led by the Spirit*, says the apostle, *Rom. viii. 14. they are the sons of God*; God is their father, from whose spirit they receive this *new nature, these holy dispositions*, that make them like to God himself; and, they are his children, as they are *regenerated* and sanctified by his grace, and receive all their spiritual food and nourishment from him.

He then, without dispute, is *the son of God*, who is influenced by the spirit of God, who resigns himself to the guidance of his holy word, who by the power of divine grace endeavours to mortify and subdue every worldly lust, every sinful, inordinate desire: And in this sense must we understand the phrase in many places of scripture, and especially

cially in this epistle: Thus at the 9th verse of this chapter, *Whoſoever is born of God, doth not commit ſin*, for his ſeed remaineth in him, and *he cannot ſin* becauſe *he is born of God*, i. e. a true child of God, influenced by the ſpirit of God, will not commit ſin, it is what he *hates* and *abhors*, it is contrary to his temper, it is againſt the *bent* and *inclination* of his mind; ſuch holy and *regenerate* perſons as theſe, are children of God in the higheſt and moſt noble ſenſe of the word.

But then, all who have the honour of being called the ſons of God in ſcripture, are not thus actually *regenerate*; ſome are no leſs diſobedient to their *heavenly Father*, than they are to their *natural* parents. It is indeed a moſt unnatural and ſurpriſing thing, that any of us ſhould be undutiful to ſo good and gracious a Father; yet ſuch there are; *Hear, O Heavens, and give ear, O Earth*, ſays God by the prophet, *I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled againſt me*; where God calls them children, we ſee, though very bad ones.

Taking the phraſe then in this ſenſe, as it denotes the being regenerate and made like unto God, tho' it expreſſes the *duty* of every child of God, and what he *ought* to be, yet it is too narrow to give the full import of what we are to underſtand by our being

being the sons of God: A privilege that seems to be conferred on *many*, too many indeed, that are *unworthy*, and not so *dutiful* to their Father as they ought to be. Wherefore,

4. A son or child of God, in the most general acceptation, and as I shall at present understand it, is one, who is made such by virtue of a *covenant relation*, and by *adoption*.

Such is every one that is baptized into the covenant of grace, every one that is *incorporated* into the Christian church, or admitted into the knowledge and service of the true God and his son Jesus Christ.

And, as the *children of Israel* were once called the *children of God*, Deut. xiv. 1. because he had chosen them to be his *peculiar* people before all other nations in the world; so are all Christians now his people, *chosen of the Lord, a holy generation*, &c. Not that they are all such by an *inward change*, but by a *federal holiness*, by reason of their separation from the rest of the world by a *new covenant*. For *when the fullness of the time was come*, as the apostle tells us, Gal. iv. 4, 5, *God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law; to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

A term frequently used by the apostle, to signify that *filial relation* to God, which all, that are members of Christ's body, are taken into, and whereby they are made the sons of God.

Adoption was a practice common in former ages, both among *Jews* and *Heathens*, and it was the taking in of a stranger, on the want or loss of *natural issue*, into the relation of a son, and into all the rights and privileges belonging to him. Thus *Rachel*, on the want of issue by her husband, adopted the children of her maid *Bilhah*, as *Leah* did those of *Zilpah*; so *Jacob* adopted the sons of *Joseph*, *Ephraim* and *Manasseh*: In all which cases, these adopted children were instated in equal privileges with the *genuine issue* of those persons, and enjoyed all the rights and benefits of such. Thus again, *Pharaoh's* daughter took *Moses* when cast out, and nourished him for her own son, that is, she *adopted* him as such, and by virtue of that adoption, he would have enjoyed the *crown* of *Pharaoh*, but that he *esteemed the reproach of Christ better than all the treasures of Egypt*.

Now, in reference to this ancient custom, are we Christians often said in scripture to be adopted sons of God; for tho' the *Jews* were once his only children, to *whom pertained the adoption*, the glory, and the covenant,

nant, yet this covenant was but a temporary institution, to last only till the Son of God should come and establish a better and more perfect one. Accordingly, after they had been trained up, and exercised under the *Mosaic* law, which was their *School-master* to bring them to Christ, God sent forth his Son in human flesh, who complied with, and performed the whole law himself, to release them from the *burden* of it, and make them partakers of his promises by faith only, without those ceremonial observances.

But the *Jews*, fond of chains, and in love with slavery, and at the same time puffed up with a spiritual pride and presumption, would not quit their own laws for a more manly religion, for the more rational service of the gospel; they rejected the person of Christ, his doctrine and *miracles*, which so plainly proved him to be the *Messiah* they expected; they shut their eyes against the clearest evidence and conviction, so that the apostles at length, by their master's express command, turned to the Gentiles, and *preached the word of this salvation* unto *them*; and as many among them as received Christ, to *them*, says the Evangelist, *gave he power*, that is, the *right* and *privilege*, of becoming *the sons of God*, John i. 12.

And thus it is that we Christians are now called and received into the adoption of children, and become the sons of God, The great blessings we receive thereby, how great an honour it is, and how unspeakable an instance of God's love to us, is the II^d point to be considered. Behold, says the apostle, with a pious *transport* and *admiration*, *behold, what manner of love the Father, &c.*

We that were before *slaves* of Satan, are now become sons of God; we, who were strangers and aliens, turned out, as it were, from his family and protection, are received hereby into favour, become the children of a kind indulgent Father, who has infinite wisdom to discern, and infinite goodness to give us whatever may tend to our present comfort or eternal happiness.

A Father's heart is ever full of a tender care and concern for his children; he will more easily pardon their offences, will more favourably overlook their infirmities, more patiently hear and grant their desires, and give them a better and firmer title to his possessions, than he will to others that bear no relation to him.

It is true, God will be *just*, as he is *good*, to all, to the *Jew*, and to the Gentile, as well as to the Christian. But there are some *peculiar* graces, some paternal favours, he
has

has promised to bestow on his children by *adoption*.

And the 1st of these is pardon of sins upon *sincere repentance*. The unbelieving *Jews* and Gentiles, and all others in their natural state, who are not entered into covenant with Christ (however God may deal with them) had no positive assurance of pardon, even upon repentance; God had not promised it but by the revelation of Christ; it is the peculiar doctrine of the Gospel, *Repent and be baptized, and your sins shall be blotted out; and whosoever believes and is baptized, shall be saved*.

And therefore, how sad and uncomfortable does the apostle represent their state to be, who are without Christ, strangers to the covenant of promise, having no solid hopes of mercy, and without God in the world!

But we Christians, who are his children, have the strongest assurances possible, grounded on his infallible promise, that if we renounce our sins and rebellion, by the intercession of Jesus Christ, we shall be forgiven; by his wounds we shall be *healed*, and by his blood reconciled to God.

And this mercy of reconciliation does properly belong to us, as *sons of God*; as such, who, though they have *gone astray*,
are

are now *returned home* to their Father, to the great *Shepherd and Bishop of souls*.

And, as God is ready to receive, with open arms, any of his *repenting*, though sometimes *disobedient* children: So,

2dly, As we are his children, he will not be *severe* to mark what is done *amiss*; tho' after our return, through the infirmity of the flesh, we should not live up to a *perfect*, unfinning obedience; provided only, we do our *best*, and not *wilfully* give way to the *corruptions* of nature. The condition of the first covenant was extremely *strict* and *rigorous*, no less than *perfect* obedience; but now God deals with us like a tender parent; does not cast off for small offences, but as *a father pitieth his own children*, so is *the Lord merciful to them that fear him*, that is, to all such as do not *wilfully* and willingly displease him, *Psalms* ciii. 17.

And this mercy we enjoy likewise, as the children of God; for so the prophet describes the happy state of good men under the Christian dispensation, *They shall be mine*, saith the Lord, *in the day when I make up my jewels*, and *I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him*, *Mal.* iii. 17. Moreover,

3dly.

3dly, He that is a son or child of God, is permitted to have an *easy access* to the *throne* of grace; has the peculiar honour of addressing his Father, as for pardon of sins, so for all other mercies he stands in need of, with a filial confidence and assurance of a *gracious answer*. The Heathens served gods that were hard-hearted, inexorable, who could not hear or help them; the *Jews* served the true God in a slavish manner, more out of fear than love; and when they had *sinned*, were to bring an expensive sacrifice to be offered for them, whilst they themselves stood at a *distance*.

But now, upon the death of the high priest of our profession, we have liberty to enter into the holiest of holies by the blood of Jesus. Having him for *our priest*, we henceforward *draw near with full assurance of faith*, having *our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience*; that is, if we only take care not to come polluted with the guilt of any unrepented sin, we may ourselves offer up our prayers to God, with a *full assurance* of being accepted thro' Christ.

And this privilege likewise are we entitled to, as sons of God by adoption: *For we have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear*, as under the law; *but we have received*
the

the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father, Rom. viii. 15. And the spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the sons of God, and may boldly call him Father.

4. *Lastly, The last great and invaluable blessing we enjoy as sons of God, is the redemption of the body from the grave to eternal life, and the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven: If children, says the apostle, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Beloved, says St. John, in the verse following the text, Now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*

A glorious resurrection to life and immortality, is what belongs only to such as mortify the deeds of the flesh; as the apostle assures us, Rom. viii. 13. To such as are sons of God, and joint heirs with Christ, for they only shall receive what he calls the adoption, that is, the redemption of the body; shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, that is, from that mortality which made them subject to bondage, and the fear of which disturbed all the tranquillity of their life, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

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This then may well be reserved, as the last and greatest of those favours our heavenly Father has promised to bestow upon us; *so great, as that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can it enter the heart of man to conceive*; so great, that we must first lay down this *earthly tabernacle*, and this *mortal* must put on immortality, before we can be *capable* of enjoying it; it being the highest and most consummate happiness, and the portion only of *just men made perfect*.

And now then, *behold*, with the greatest joy and admiration, *what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, by thus making us the sons of God!*

Lord, *What is man*, that thou art thus mindful of him, or *the son of man*, that thou so regardest him! That God should condescend to take us who were but *dust* and *ashes*, *rebels* and *enemies*, and place us so near himself, to make us heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ his eternal son! This is the greatest *miracle* as well as *mercy*, that was ever revealed to the mind of man!

O how much are we bound to extol the goodness of God! What thanks and praises do we owe to him and his son Jesus Christ! Who became a pilgrim on earth, to make us citizens of heaven! Who became the *son of man*, to make us *sons* of God! Who was made obedient to the law, to deliver us
from

from the curse of the law! Who became poor, to make us rich! Who suffered disgrace and death, to make us live for ever, and advance us to *eternal* honour! But let us proceed therefore, in the

III^d and last place, to consider how we *ought* to behave ourselves, if we would act conformably to the duties and dignity of this glorious *title*, which God thro' Christ hath thus bestowed upon us. And,

1. The sense of this great honour and privilege should always make us *ashamed* of doing things that are *mean* and *vile*, and *unbecoming* the dignity of our high and holy vocation. When any *temptation* offers to seduce us into sin, let us always remember, we are *sons of God* and *heirs of the kingdom of heaven*, and should we comply with it, should we *commit wickedness*, we degrade ourselves, we make ourselves *contemptible*, and may thereby lose our *birthright* and *inheritance*. For tho' God be a *gracious* and merciful *Father*, yet still he is a holy and *just* God, *jealous* of his honour, and whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity without abhorrence and indignation.

2. As we Christians have the honour of being *sons of God*, so consequently should
we

Of being the SONS of GOD. III

we treat one another as *brethren*, with kindness and mercy, with compassion and humanity, *in honour preferring one another*. If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

It is highly absurd and unnatural, to see malice, envy, and dissension among *brethren*, much more among Christians, who are all so nearly related to the God of love and peace. *Sirs, ye are brethren*, says the pacific *Moses* to his quarrelsome countrymen, *Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye wrong one to another?* Have ye not enemies enough on all hands that are daily plotting your destruction, but must ye be devouring and worrying one another? Certainly this is very unbecoming the character of such as are *brethren*, sons of God, and disciples of the meek and peaceable Jesus.

3. *Lastly*, and to conclude therefore, let us learn to resemble that God, whose children we are, to be kind and merciful to each other, as God is to us all; let us put on the spirit and *temper* of Christ our elder brother, and *be followers* of God as dear children; let us be holy as he is holy, perfect as he is perfect, and endeavour to be like him here, as we hope to enjoy the blessed sight of him hereafter.

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To this end, let us conclude with that admirable collect, O God, whose blessed Son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us sons of God, and heirs of eternal life; grant, we beseech thee, that having this hope, we may purify ourselves, even as he is pure; that when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom, where with the Father and the Holy Ghost he liveth, &c.

S E R M O N VIII.

*Of the KNOWLEDGE and SERVICE of
G O D.*

P A R T I.

I C H R O N. xxviii. 9.

*And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the
God of thy father, and serve him with a
perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for
the Lord searcheth all hearts, and under-
standeth all the imaginations of the thoughts;
if thou seek him, he will be found of thee;
but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee
off for ever.*

TH E great and good king *David* hav-
ing called a solemn assembly of all
Israel, and with a grateful heart acknow-
ledged the distinguishing favour of God, in
making him king before any other of his fa-
ther's

ther's house, proceeds to acquaint them, that the same gracious God had chosen *Solomon*, of all his sons, to succeed him in his kingdom, *v. 5.* and had moreover so highly honoured him, as to appoint him the builder of that house and temple for the ark of God, which he himself had intended, but was not permitted to do, because *he had been a man of war, and had shed blood*, *ver. 3.*

Now, in order to make this young prince worthy of so great an honour, and become a blessing to the people over which he should preside, the good father presses him to a *sincere* observance of the laws, and the practice of religion. He does not put him upon the enlarging his dominions, the vexing and harassing his neighbours, the oppressing his own subjects, or making himself *arbitrary* and uncontrollable, but bids him fear and serve God; to be a *good king*, he must first of all be a religious one. *And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart*; and to make him thus perfect and *sincere* in the service of God, to beat him off from all hypocrisy and dissimulation, so common in the courts of kings, and among great men, he adds, *For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but*
if

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if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

Which most admirable instruction, tho' here given by a king to his son, is no less absolutely necessary to be followed by all, that would be sons and heirs of the kingdom of heaven: and is, indeed, no more, than what the great King of Heaven requires of all his children and subjects, of all that are called the sons of God, or would be heirs with Christ of eternal glory.

For in the words, you observe, are contained matters of the greatest importance.

I. That we *know* the God of our father.

II. That we *serve* him.

III. The qualifications necessary to make our service acceptable; a *perfect heart*, and a *willing mind*.

IV. and *Lastly*, The motives to induce us to such a sincere service of God; *For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.*

I. The first thing here required, and to which I confine the present discourse, is, that we *know* God; and with good reason, because, without this, it is impossible to *serve* him. The foundation of all the homage and worship we pay to God, is a *right knowledge* of him, a *worthy apprehension* of his glorious perfections: For this reason, our Lord declares in the gospel; *This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God.* By *knowing* God we must not, cannot understand a full and *complete* knowledge of his *essence* and perfections; for, *Behold, God is great, and we know him not*, Job xxxvi. 26. God is infinite, and therefore incomprehensible to finite understandings: But, by knowing God, we mean such *worthy* thoughts or conceptions of him, as are requisite to make us pay him that reasonable service, which is due from a rational creature to his creator.

And here, I presume, I need not premise that, before we can have *any*, much less a right apprehension of God, we must believe *that he is*. This the apostle lays down as a first principle, Heb. xi. 6. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

He must be fully persuaded and convinced, that there is one supreme, almighty governor,
nor,

nor, a being of all perfections, who presides over the world, which we call God; who, as he first made all things by his infinite power, so he still preserves them in being; he governs and disposes every thing to such ends and purposes as are approved of by his infinite wisdom. Now, this must be a certain and necessary truth, it is the genuine dictate of reason; and therefore the Atheist, or he that says in his heart, *there is no God*, proves himself thereby to be what the Psalmist justly stiles him, a *Fool*; that is, one destitute and deprived of that natural sense and reason, which is common to Mankind.

For, had he the use of reason, or would he hearken to the *sense* of his own mind, this would teach him to conclude the necessary existence of a God, from every thing that his senses could perceive to exist in the world; every thing that lives, moves, or has a being, would afford him an argument that there is a God.

For, if God was not, how could any thing be? Nothing could have a being, unless it has it from God: For nothing can give being to itself, but God only. That *there is a God*, then, is to be acknowledged as the first and *fundamental truth* on which all others depend, and without which, we could have no such thing as *truth* or certainty in

the world; and so clear and evident it is, to the natural sense and understanding of men, that he must be supposed to have lost *both* that denies it.

Let us therefore now enquire, what it is to *know God*, or what it is we must know of him, in order to our paying him that reasonable service and worship, which he *requires from us, and has made necessary to salvation.*

Now, a right knowledge of God, and such as is necessary to make us serve him as we ought, may imply a *right knowledge*, or rather, a *right apprehension*, 1. Of the Essence. 2. The Attributes. 3. Of the Works. And, 4. Of the Will of God. And,

1. It is necessary to entertain a right apprehension of the Essence of God, as a *Being of all possible perfections, a pure incorruptible spirit*, the *first cause* and author of all things, the infinite source of all those excellencies and beauties we discern in the creatures, and of all the happiness they enjoy; the great Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift; an *infinite, almighty mind*, universally extended through the whole creation, and which gives *life and motion* to every part of it; for in him we *live and move*, and, by his
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continual influence and power, are preserved and supported in *being*.

But then, as the nature and essence of God is *incomprehensible* by human understanding, so all his *powers* and faculties, and the ways and methods in which he exercises them, are infinitely beyond our reach; and, of which we are utterly incapable of framing any exact and adequate conceptions. All the *descriptions* or ideas we can frame of God or his *attributes*, must be taken, not from any direct and immediate perceptions we have of him or them, but from some observations we have made of his works; and, from the consideration of those qualifications, that, we conceive, would enable us to perform the like. For, as God is the object of none of our senses, by which we receive all our direct and immediate perception of things; so, if we would know or conceive any thing of him at all, it must be by *deductions* of reason, by *analogy* and comparison with something we do know, or are acquainted with. Thus, when we behold the mighty structure of this world, the great *order*, *regularity*, and *fitness* of every *part* of it, to preserve and support *the whole*; we justly conclude there must be great *wisdom*, understanding and power, to contrive and settle things in so excellent a manner, because we cannot perceive how all this could

be done without the exercise of such faculties; and therefore, we suppose God, the author of all these things, must either have these powers and faculties, or others equivalent to them, and adequate to those mighty effects which proceed from them. For, as the cause can be known only by the effects, so it is certain, man could produce *nothing* like it, without such excellent powers and faculties; which, therefore, we attribute to God, by way of resemblance and analogy to *such* as we find necessary to this end, and esteem the most *noble* and perfect in ourselves.

Accordingly, if we consult the holy scripture, and consider the *representations* there given us of God, we find them borrowed from some resemblance to things, with which we are acquainted by our senses. Thus, when *God* is said to *speak*, to have *eyes*, *hands*, or *feet*, such expressions are not designed to infuse a notion, as if he had these *members* in the literal signification, but only that he has a power to execute all those acts, to which these members in us are instrumental; that he can converse with men, as effectually as if he had a tongue or mouth; he can discern all we do or say, as perfectly as if he had eyes or ears; he can reach us wherever we are, as if he had *hands* or *feet*; he has as
true

true and substantial a being, as if he had a body, and is as really present every where, as if that body was infinitely extended. Only we are to observe, he can do all this in a manner infinitely more perfect, and by such *powers* and *faculties*, as are infinitely beyond our knowledge and conception. So again, when we find him represented, as actuated by such passions as we perceive in ourselves, *viz.* as *angry*, or pleased, as loving, hating, or repenting, as inclined to compassion, or provoked to *revenge*; we cannot suppose the divine nature is really subject to such passions; the meaning of such expressions is manifestly this, that he will punish as certainly the sinner, and reward the good, as if he were really *angry* with the one, and *delighted* with the other; that when men repent, and turn from their wickedness, he will as *surely* change his *dispensation* with them, as if he had *really repented*, and changed his mind.

Thus are the passions of men, and the powers and operations of our minds, ascribed to God by way of analogy and comparison, and in condescension to the weakness of our capacities; because, the nature and perfections of God, being incomprehensible, especially in our present state of imperfection, we cannot speak of God in any other manner, we are capable of no other knowledge

ledge of him, and we must be contented to *know him this way*, or not at all. However, it concerns us frequently to call to mind the apostle's observation, 1 Cor. xiii.

12. *For now we see thro' a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am known.* Tho' our present knowledge of God be very imperfect, yet it is enough to waken our desires of more; tho' we cannot understand, or conceive the enjoyments of the blessed, yet the description we have of them, is sufficient to engage our pursuit after them, and to make us prosecute the means prescribed in Scripture for the attainment of them.

The nature of God then being thus infinitely above the reach of human understanding, we are not to be surprized, if there are some things declared of him in his revelation, which we cannot comprehend; such as the mystery of the *Trinity*, his foreknowledge and predetermination of future events, &c. These things can never be fully explained to our present *short* capacities, and the attempt to do it, would only make them still the more dark and *mysterious*. There are many difficulties in the works of nature, in things that are the daily objects of our senses, which the most refined understanding can never penetrate into: For *hardly do we guess aright at the things that are*
upon

upon earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us; but the things of God, who hath searched out? Wild. ix. 16.

All we can do therefore, is to learn to entertain the best, and most worthy notions of God; so to *conceive*, so to *speak* of him, as to excite us to fear and adore him; so to reflect on his transcendent Majesty, as to worship and praise him, to *love*, *honour*, and *obey* him, with *all our soul*, with *all our mind*, and with *all our strength*.

But because it is very difficult for us, who are but dust and ashes, to have such high and worthy conceptions of God as we ought, we are directed, in order to raise our thoughts of him,

2. To consider those glorious perfections belonging to him, which are called the *Attributes* of God, *viz.* that he is infinitely *wise* and *all-knowing*, the great *searcher* of hearts; so that we cannot so much as *conceive* a thought or imagination in the mind, but God knows it, and sees it, as much as if we had acted or spoken it to the eye of the world: That he is invested with almighty power, and can do whatever pleaseth him in heaven and earth; that he is infinitely good and gracious to his creatures, and extends his mercy over all his works; that he is a *pure* and *holy* being, *eternal*, *unchangeable*,

able, not subject to human passions and infirmities, not like a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent; that he is extended to, and present in, all places, overseeing all things, and going thro' all understandings, all pure and most subtle spirits, Wisd. vii. There being no creature that is not manifest and open to his view, whose eyes are in every place, beholding both the evil and the good; who is about our bed, and about our path, and spieth out all our ways.

3. To the consideration of the divine attributes, it will further help us to raise our conceptions of God, if we reflect on the wonderful Works he hath done, and whereby he has manifested to the sense and reason of men, his invisible Majesty, his eternal power and Godhead.

For it was he who formed this beautiful, magnificent fabrick of the world, which we behold and enjoy, who commanded the sun to run its course by day, and the moon by night, to give light and comfort to the inhabitants of the earth; who adorned the heavens with that innumerable multitude of stars, possibly so many distant worlds, which, tho' *they differ* from each other *in glory*, do all unanimously concur to shew forth the *transcendent glories* of their *omnipotent creator*.

And,

And, as he made the world, so he takes care to preserve and govern it; he does not sit still as an idle spectator, he ruleth in the kingdom of men; he disposes of the dominions, and directs the hearts of princes; he presides over the counsels of state, the success of wars, and ordereth all the actions of men, and events of things so, as seemeth best to his all-seeing wisdom. And here, among the many other marvellous works of God, we must never forget that most glorious one of all, which men have the greatest cause to rejoice in, which angels themselves desire to look into, which has put an end to the tyranny of devils, and manifested the power of God beyond any other works he ever did before; I mean the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the most excellent of God's works, which brings the greatest glory to God on high, the most desirable peace on earth, and the most extensive good-will to men; for which therefore, we can never return sufficient praise and adoration, as we can never find a more worthy subject for our devout study and contemplation. Now, from a serious contemplation on the perfections and works of God, it is natural to proceed farther, and be desirous of knowing something of his Will, and to serve and *worship* him as our Father and Creator. Therefore,

4. *Lastly,*

4. *Lastly*, The last particular implied in the right knowledge of God, is the knowledge of his Will: Since without *that*, no man can have a right notion of God, or serve him acceptably and according to his will. Now, if there be a God, or a supreme, almighty being, who requires to be worshipped by men, both his wisdom and goodness will induce him to make known to men, *how* and in *what manner* he will be worshipped by them. Common reason, it is true, tells us, God is to be *worshipped*, and that with a *pure mind*, with *upright hearts* and *clean hands*; but, the light of reason has been found weak and dim, and not sufficient to keep men from idolatry, superstition, and all kinds of impiety and immorality, which they have introduced into, and made a part of their divine worship; this makes *revelation* necessary, and shews the expediency of a clearer and more *perfect light*, to lead us into and preserve us in the right way of salvation. And this, God has been pleased to do, by the mouth of his holy prophets in the *Old Testament*, and more plainly still, by that of Christ and his Apostles in the *New*; where the whole substance of our duty both to God and man is most clearly laid before us, and the noble reward of it, life and immortality, set in open view. No man can now be ignorant of the
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service and duty, God requires from him, who has either eyes to read, or ears to hear the word of God read to him; and, no man that reads or studies the holy Scripture, with that diligence and devotion which the holy Psalmist did, but will find himself strongly inclined to *love his commandments above gold or precious stones*, Psalm cxix. As being, indeed, what he has elsewhere described them, Psalm xix. 10, 11. *Much more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, or the honey-comb. Moreover by them is thy servant taught: And in keeping of them there is great reward.*

And thus have we briefly considered, what it is we must know of God; what sort of conceptions we ought to have of his adorable Majesty, before we can offer him that *acceptable and reasonable* service he requires from us, or obtain that eternal life and happiness annexed to it. Only this we are to take along with us, that after our highest and most *exalted notions* of God, we must still come short; for, *How shall we be able to magnify him*, as the wise son of Sirach observes, Eccles. xlix. 28. *who is great above all his works; the Lord is great and very terrible, and marvellous in his power: When you glorify God therefore, exalt him as much as you can, for even yet, he will far exceed; and when you exalt him, put forth all your strength, and be*
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not weary, for you can never go far enough: Who hath seen him, that he may tell us, and who can magnify him as he is? There are yet hid greater things than these, for we have seen but few of his works. For the Lord hath made all things, and to the godly hath he given wisdom.

And, may that God, in the knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, inspire us all with this true knowledge of him, and with grace to live according to it; that we, who know him now in part, and by faith only, may, after this life, have the fruition of his glorious godhead, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

S E R M O N IX.

*Of the KNOWLEDGE and SERVICE
of GOD.*

P A R T II.

I C H R O N. xxviii. 9.

*And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the
God of thy father, and serve him with a
perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for
the Lord searcheth all hearts, and under-
standeth all the imaginations of the thoughts;
if thou seek him, he will be found of thee;
but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee
off for ever.*

IN these words, as I have observed, you
have the religious advice of a good fa-
ther to his son; wherein is set forth the
duty and service we all owe to God
our heavenly father, and how we must
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perform it, so as to make it acceptable to him, *Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.*

And because the knowledge of God is necessary to our paying him that reasonable service and obedience due to him, I have already considered, what it is to *know God*, that is, to have *right and worthy conceptions* of God, with regard to the essence and attributes, the works, and the will of God.

But, now, because the right knowledge of God is a matter of the greatest importance and concernment to us, to prevent mistakes, I desire you would take notice, that by the *knowledge* of God, we must not understand only a general *superficial* notion of him, but such a religious *sense* and apprehension of God, as may influence the *heart and affections*, such as does not only swim in the brain, but sink down into, and inflame the soul; whereby a man doth so think of God, as to adore his Majesty, revere his power, love his goodness, and confide in his *wisdom and providence*.

Such an *affecting and practical* knowledge as this, we may be sure, is what king *David*

vid meant, when he commanded his son to know the God of his father; because he immediately adds, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. It is a rule in the interpretation of holy Scripture, that words which denote *sense* and *apprehension*, are always so to be understood, as to carry along with them those suitable *affections* and *effects* that are consequent upon them. It is not *knowledge*, unless a man stand *affected* towards things, as the nature of the things known does require: To *know God* therefore, denotes those pious *emotions* and *affections* of the mind, which are the natural effects of this knowledge; thus, *Psalms* xc. 11. *Who knoweth the power of thy wrath?* that is, who regards or considers it, so as to awake from sin and repent? *Israel doth not know*, that is, doth not consider or take notice of God's mercies, *Isaiah* i. 3. It denotes a religious confidence and trust in God, *I know that my Redeemer liveth*, *Job* xix. 25. I have an absolute faith and assurance that it is so, and acquiesce in it; and, *they that know thy name will put their trust in thee*, *Psalms* ix. 10. Thus we find God expol-

lating with his people, *Mal. i. 6. A son honouretb his father, and a servant his master : If I be a father, where is my honour ? And if I be a master, where is my fear ?* To know or understand God therefore, in the right sense of the word, must imply such notions in the mind, as may produce its consequent effects, an awful fear and filial love, an assiduous endeavour to please him, an indefatigable activity in executing all his commands.

Now, from what has been said, it is easy for every man to discover, whether he have a true knowledge of God : For, if the consideration of his glory and excellencies, of his wisdom, goodness and power, do move us to worship and adore him, to fear, love and confide in him ; if the sense of his paternal love, patience and mercy towards men, do excite us to imitate these divine qualities towards one another ; if our ideas and conceptions of God produce such effects as these, *then* do we truly know God, and may hope, hereafter, to see him as he is, and know him more perfectly, even as we are known.

But alas ! How many, even among them that pretend to be the servants of the true God and of Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, fall vastly short of *such a knowledge* ! How many write and dispute with great
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heat and learning, in defence of his being and attributes, and yet know nothing of him as they ought to know !

For the right knowledge of God will necessarily incline us to love him, as being the spring and fountain of every thing that is good, and the supreme happiness of man ; and, if we love God, we must keep his commandments ; for *this is the love of God*, says the apostle, herein chiefly consists our love, that we keep his commandments, 1 John v. 4.

And therefore, all that live in the neglect of any of his commandments, cannot be said to love him, nor consequently, to know him ; for, as the same apostle tells us expressly, *chap. ii. ver. 3, 4. Hereby do we know that we know God, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

And how, indeed, can we judge otherwise ? How shall we be able to think that a man knows, believes or understands, if he act contrary ? If a man believes there is a just and omnipotent God, to whom he is accountable, and who will punish sinners with eternal misery, will he dare, by a wicked life, to provoke his displeasure ? Can a man be said to know or believe a thing to be deadly poison, if he will take it ? Or, can he

be said to *acknowledge* or *believe* a God, who is every day affronting and *denying* him by a wicked and ungodly life?

A man be able to write and speak many excellent things of God and virtue, and yet, live and act an enemy to both; and, if he be ever so capable to *teach* others, he is most miserable of all, if he cannot *teach* himself. It was a most instructive rebuke that our Lord gave his disciples, when they brought him an account how successful they had been in *casting out devils*: *In this*, says he, *rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, that your names are written in heaven.* Judas himself was one of the persons invested with a power of casting devils out of others; yet, we read, that Satan afterwards *entered into* Judas, and that it had *been good for him if he had never been born.* It is true, as Solomon observes, *He that winneth souls is wise*: A man of knowledge should gladly impart any useful discoveries for the benefit of mankind; but yet, at the same time, he should consider, that he only who shall *do as well as teach* the commandments of God, *shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*; and, that many, at the last day, will plead their having *prophefied, and preached, and cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in his name*; and yet, shall be disclaimed by him,

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as workers of iniquity; *Depart from me, I know you not.*

The knowledge of God therefore, without a suitable practice of piety, will never avail; and they that would know enough to make them happy at last, must imitate those *truly wise men*, who not only informed the people of *Jerusalem* of the star they had seen in the east, but actually followed it themselves, until it had brought them to Christ.

For as he that truly knows God, must necessarily love and obey him; so, on the other hand, no man can truly serve or worship God, who has not a right knowledge and worthy apprehension of those things he has revealed of himself in holy Scripture.

Our blessed Saviour tells us, he is the way, the truth and the life; that God is a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and truth. He now requires a *rational service*, Rom. xii. 1. the obedience of our souls as well as bodies; the adoration of our minds, as well as the praises of our lips; that, as *we pray with the spirit, we should pray with the understanding also*, 1 Cor. xiv. 15. That we should know and understand, as far as we are capable, what that adorable being is we pray to, as well as what we pray for; which if we do not, we can

never pray in faith; and without faith, it is impossible to please him, Heb. xi. 6.

Here then, you see the inseparable connection between the *right knowledge* and true service of God, and the *absurdity* of those who maintain, that *ignorance is the mother of devotion*; as if that man were most inclined to serve God, who knows least of him, who understands not the reason why, or the manner how to serve him. But this surely, must be a very *blind devotion*, and men must be extremely *blind* and *ignorant*, that can think this to be devotion. For to be truly devout in our worship of God, is to be possessed with a just and awful sense of his infinite majesty and goodness, his omnipresence, omniscience, and all-sufficiency; but, if a man considers not that the God he adores, hath these perfections, or knows not what they are, how can they create such devout affections in him? How is it possible he should be moved, or any way touched with the sense of these glorious attributes of God, (which is the true nature of devotion) if he has no *true notion* or apprehension of them?

Since then, the knowledge of God is so absolutely necessary to our serving him as he requires, I shall beg leave, as a conclusion of my present discourse, to offer some considerations,

siderations, to persuade men to endeavour after it. And,

1. Let us consider that God hath made us reasonable creatures, and that for this end, that we might *know* and *worship* him that made us; this is the proper use and improvement of reason, and herein consists the excellency and felicity of man. There is no creature in this lower world but *man* capable of religion, or the knowledge of *things divine*; but, man was made after God's own image and similitude, and had such powers and faculties given him, that he might aspire to be really like him in the happiness and perfection of his nature.

For to what end did our Creator give us a spirit of knowledge and understanding, but that we might be capable of reflecting on him who gave us being; that we might honour and adore him, who, besides our being, still gives us all the good things we enjoy.

The very nature of man inclines him to be religious, and his own mind tells him there is a God to be worshipped. The soul naturally seeks after God, and the true exercise of reason is in the practice of religion.

There is nothing that nature teaches more plainly throughout the whole creation, than
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gratitude; the very ox knoweth his owner, as the prophet speaks, and *the ass his master's crib*, Isaiah i. 3. The very beasts pay a regard to such as kindly maintain them, and men must be more *stupid* than these, if they know not him who gives them life and breath, and all things plenteously to enjoy.

For shame then, let not men be the most irregular, the most unnatural part of the creation; let not the beasts that perish, nay, things *inanimate*, the heavens and the earth, be called upon to upbraid us, as they will do, if we *know* not God.

2. We may consider further, we are not only men, capable of reason and religion, but *Christians, disciples of the blessed Jesus*, whom God sent into the world to suffer and to die for us. We are the chosen people of God, a *royal priesthood*, an holy nation, taken into his immediate care and protection, and instructed in the last and most perfect revelation of his Will.

And shall we, under such peculiar advantages and opportunities of knowledge, live in ignorance of that God, who has done such great things for us? Indeed, while the world lay under the darkness of heathenism and idolatry, God might graciously connive at their ignorance and follies; but now,
having

having caused the Son of righteousness to shine upon us, and by his gospel enlightened the dark corners of the earth, he calls upon all men to repent, and turn to the knowledge of the true God; and if we are *blind* in the midst of so much *light*, it must be a *wilful blindness*, and God will judge it as the effect of *obstinacy* and *perverseness*. But,

3. We may consider the excellency of divine knowledge, above all other knowledge whatever. The knowledge of other things concerns only the present short life, whereas this leads to life everlasting: *This is life eternal, to know thee, &c.*

I confess, such is the folly of mankind, that they are apt to look upon the knowledge of God and religion, as a matter of little moment and small profit, and seem to prefer every other art and science before it: Whereas, there is nothing can so much assist us, either in this world, or the next, as this *divine knowledge*; and, in comparison of which, all others are as vanity and nothing.

For to give an instance or two. What is that knowledge which concerns the diseases of human bodies? Little more than bare *conjecture*, and a common distemper is found oftentimes sufficient to baffle the skill of the most learned physician. What
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is the knowledge of the laws, and the art of eloquence and oratory? This may procure and raise an estate, *esteem*, and applause in the world; but when a man comes to plead at the bar of heaven, the conscience of his own integrity will be the best *advocate* in his cause.

The knowledge of commerce, merchandize, and navigation, however *necessary* and beneficial, yet when the most thriving trader meets with losses insupportable, or the *skilful pilot* shall split upon a rock, and is lost in a tempest, he that has heaven in his eye, may steer his course without loss or danger, among the roughest storms of adversity. What is the study of politicks, of the mysteries of government, of the states and conditions of the several nations in the world? When a man is *ignorant* of his own personal interest, and when God is pleased to disappoint (as he often does) the counsels of the wisest *Achitophel*, and turn his wisdom into folly. And as to the art of husbandry, when the crop fails, as it sometimes does, after all the care and fatigue of man, he who serves God, the master of the seasons, and sows the seed of righteousness and mercy, need not *fear* a *joyful* and *plentiful* harvest in heaven. So excellent is this knowledge above all others! Not that I would depreciate and undervalue any other art or
science

science whatever; they are all the gifts of God, commendable and useful in their kind: But still, the *knowledge* of religion, I say, serves to much *better* and *nobler purposes*, and should be *most studied* and desired by every Christian; that is, among all his other pursuits and applications, his chief business should be the pursuit of virtue, the knowledge and service of God, since it is by that alone he can secure his eternal interest.

And yet, to our shame be it spoken, how many do we see very *expert* in the knowledge of the world, some very eminent for their improvement in sciences and languages, and few but understand the mysteries of their several trades and callings, and yet extremely ignorant, or at least very *defective*, in things relating to their high and holy vocation? They know all other things, but know not, or will not acknowledge that *Great God*, by whose blessing they know every thing else. But alas! this is such an impious *neglect* and *contempt* of him, such a provoking *ingratitude*, as is sufficient to make him deprive us of all knowledge, and the use of that reason, whereby we are able to *understand* other things; since we are so much more solicitous about *trifles*, than *how* to enjoy the favour of that most perfect and glorious being, from whom we
derive

derive our knowledge, and every blessing we enjoy. For,

4. *Lastly*, To continue ignorant of God; and of the things he hath revealed of himself in holy Scripture, is the chief cause of all the sins and miscarriages of men, and what naturally leads them into ruin and destruction. For thus the Prophet *Hos. iv. 6. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.* And no wonder, for *ignorance* makes way for all manner of vice and wickedness. He that has *a light* to direct him, may walk safely, and take heed to guide his steps aright; but he that walketh in *darkness*, or, which is the same, shuts his eyes against the light, *knows not whither he goeth*, and must expect to stumble and fall.

That unhappy race of men before the Flood, had no sooner suffered the knowledge of other things to make them forget the knowledge of the true God, but they fell into the *grosslest idolatry*; and, from thence, into all *lewdness and immorality*. Their great ingenuity in other arts and sciences, and particularly in building the ark to save *Noah* from the Deluge, could not save themselves from perishing in it; and, what is the reason *now* that men so boldly violate the laws of God, despise his authority, and blaspheme his

his sacred name, but that they do not sufficiently know or consider, how great, how holy, how just and powerful that God is, with whom they have to do? For, *Who regardeth the power of thy wrath?* Did men truly know their God, they would not treat him with such disrespect and scorn. A just sense of his adorable Majesty, would make them ashamed, or afraid, so frequently to affront him; but, they would be persuaded to live and act in all things as persons who are sensible they are under the immediate inspection of a most *tremendous* and *Almighty Being*; whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good; who sees and knows their most secret thoughts, words and actions, and will, one day, render to every man according to his works.

S E R M O N X.

*Of the KNOWLEDGE and SERVICE of
G O D.*

P A R T III.

I C H R O N. xxviii. 9.

*And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the
God of thy father, and serve him with a
perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for
the Lord searcheth all hearts, and under-
standeth all the imaginations of the thoughts;
if thou seek him, he will be found of thee;
but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee
off for ever.*

HA V I N G, in two former discourses,
considered what is the right know-
ledge of God, and wherein it con-
sists, and proposed some motives and en-
couragements to prevail upon men to
seek

seek after this knowledge, I proceed now to the

II^d Thing necessary to be spoken to, *viz.* What is the right service of God, which this knowledge never fails to produce, and which alone shall be finally recompenced with eternal life.

As it is impossible to serve God before we know him, and have entertained such worthy apprehensions of him as are suitable to his glorious perfections, so, after we have attained this knowledge, we must serve and obey him; for otherwise our knowledge of him will only encrease our guilt, and aggravate our eternal condemnation. The servant that knows his Lord, and what his will is, but neglects or refuses to do it, *shall be beaten with many stripes.* So necessary is it to add to our knowledge, virtue and good works, without which we are esteemed barren and unfruitful in our profession, our faith is dead, and profiteth nothing.

That there is a God to whom service and worship is due, seems to be the universal voice of nature. No nation was ever so barbarous and ignorant but acknowledged some God, and paid worship and homage to what they conceived to be God; and though some have worshipped many gods,
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and even stocks and stones, yet they generally owned one Supreme Being, the great Father and Creator of all things; that he had an absolute right and dominion over them, and that all their service and worship was but a debt most reasonably due to him.

God forbid, I should say, the world is more corrupted now, than when it was overspread with heathenism and idolatry; or, that we are grown worse since we became Christians, than when we were Heathens. However, there are too many among Christians, that seem to have little or no sense of the obligation they are under to serve God; many, so entirely lost to all reason and reflection, that they have thrown off the very form of religion, and seem to think they came into the world, not to take any notice of God, but to take their pastime herein, like the *Leviathan* in the deep, to gratify their own extravagant appetites and desires. For, as the Psalmist expresses it, *They care not for God, nor is God in all their thoughts.*

Such men as these, it is in vain to discourse with, because it is impossible they should be wrought upon by *reason*, who have themselves renounced it: But, to such as *think soberly*, who hear or read the word of God with a pious desire of knowing their duty, to such, I would address myself, and proceed, as I proposed,

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To shew what is to be understood by *serving* God, and when we may be said to do so: A question, one might imagine, very easy to be resolved; and yet, there is nothing in which men are more generally mistaken.

For how many seem to think they sufficiently *serve* God, if they frequent the publick worship one day in a week; if they sometimes read or hear the word of God, if they give alms, if they conform to the religious customs of their country, and give no offence by any notorious impiety or immorality?

But sure, the service of God must be something more noble and sublime than all this amounts to; for, God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and truth. To serve God truly, is to resign up ourselves entirely to his honour; to love him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength; to employ every faculty of the soul, every member of the body, to the honour of God and the good of mankind: For, as every thing we possess was received from God's bounty, so every thing, for that reason, is to be employed to his service: Every talent we receive, must be accounted for at the day of judgment, and whatever good we do, must

be done, not that men might glorify us, but our Father which is in heaven. Which brings me to the

III^d Thing proposed, *viz.* To consider what are the qualifications requisite to make our service acceptable; and these, we are told, are a *perfect heart*, and a *willing mind*. By a perfect heart is understood, uprightness of intention, truth and sincerity; and by a willing mind, a filial love and chearful obedience. The 1st of these excludes all hypocrisy and worldly ends in our religious services, and implies, that we pay an equal regard to all his commands, and chiefly intend the promotion of his honour. For to observe some commands, and neglect others, to abstain from drunkenness or swearing, for instance, and allow ourselves in the secret sins of cheating and fraud, can never be sincerity. To be *conscientious* in some things, and *dissolute* in others, to make a shew of devotion and sobriety, and have no regard to justice or charity, is so far wide of Christian sincerity, that it is not common honesty or morality.

The apostle tells us, *if we offend but in one part*, that is, live in the neglect of any one command, tho' we keep the whole law besides, *we are guilty of all*; we are justly punishable for this one breach of duty, as if we had broken all.

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Which, how surprising soever it seems at first view, he gives this unanswerable reason for it; because, he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. It was the same almighty lawgiver that enjoined all the commandments, and his authority is rejected as well by the violation of one, as of another; and therefore if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art a transgressor of the law, *Jam. ii. 11.*

Indeed, whoever pretends to serve God in some things, and wilfully disobeys him in others, cannot be said to serve God at all; for tho' he observe some duties, yet it is evident, he does it not, because God has required it, or out of respect to his authority; for if he did so, he would obey *in all* things, and comply *with all*, as well as *some*, of his precepts: And, therefore, since he does not serve God out of a reverential regard to his authority, he does not serve God so much as himself; he obeys the laws of God, out of some worldly view, to promote his credit, or avoid some inconveniences he might incur by an *open contempt* of religion: He might lose his good name, or his interest with friends that are able to serve him; he might destroy his *health*, or his *trade*, by the commission of such and such sins. And thus, when he is serving himself, or pleasing men, he would fain be

thought to serve and please God: Whereas it is manifest, he fears men more than God; has more regard to his own *profit* and ease, than to God's love or displeasure. And therefore, since his only aim is to serve his own secular views, and to please men, he may be assured, he has already obtained his reward, and must expect none from God; since this is directly opposite to that purity of intention, which is necessary to make religious services acceptable to him; For so our Lord plainly tells us, *Matt. vi. 22.* *The light of the body is the eye, that is, the life and excellencies of our virtues, consist in the uprightness and sincerity of the heart: If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body is full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body is full of darkness.* Whatever good things we do, if we do them with an *evil intention*, for worldly ends, they become evil; for, *whatever is not of faith, is sin*, *Rom. xiv. 23.* But, *2dly*, we are to serve him with a willing mind, not as slaves serve their tyrannical masters, by force and constraint, for fear of punishment; but as sons their fathers, out of a conscience of duty, with a filial love, and chearful obedience. We are to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength, that is, with the concurrence of the whole will, and all the affections of the mind;

mind; it must be our meat and drink, as it was with Christ, our chief *delight* and *satisfaction*, to do the will of God: For if we obey God for fear only, and against the inclination of the will, our obedience is not *perfect*; for he requires the service of the whole man, the *soul*, as well as body; whereas, this is only the outward service of the body, and not that true spiritual worship of the soul, which he requires. And thus you see the nature of true religion, and of that pure and rational service we owe to God. I shall only observe further, that if our obedience do thus proceed from a *perfect heart*, and be performed with a *willing mind*, it cannot fail to be constant and lasting, and we shall walk in the same all the days of our life.

The same conscience of duty, the same filial love and fear of God, which first reconciled us to live in obedience to him, will always be exciting us to *persevere* in it. The same holy spirit that first moved us to the performance of our duty, will be ready at all times to assist and confirm us in it to the end. It is impossible, indeed, but that offences will come, troubles and afflictions will fall upon good men in the prosecution of their duty; for it is ordained, that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of
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heaven. But then, as the apostle gloriously triumphs, *Rom. viii. 35.* *What shall separate us from the love of God in Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No: I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, principalities nor powers, things present or future, height nor depth, nor any other creature, can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

But here, it may be said, how can we frail mortals, who carry a body of sin about with us, and are beset with temptations on all sides, how can we hope to serve God *always* in this manner, with perfect hearts and willing minds? Does not experience tell us, the *heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked?* And, are not good men sometimes averse to their duty, and almost weary of it, when persecutions and crosses lie heavy upon them? I confess, infirmities and frailties will attend the best of men; there will be a mixture of sin in our purest devotions, and we are not to think of *perfection*, strictly speaking, in this imperfect state. For, as long as we are cloathed with flesh, this will be a weight and snare to the soul, and sometimes shake our integrity, as well as interrupt the peace and pleasure we might expect in the paths of religion. However, this is our comfort still, we have other
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succours besides our own to support us; even the holy spirit of God, who helpeth our infirmities, *Rom. viii. 26.* and whose power is greater than that which is against us. Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world; he can enable us to bear the temptations and subdue the corruptions of human nature; be our hearts ever so frail, he can reform and *establish* them in the truth; be our souls averse and fluctuating in themselves, he can renew and sanctify them; and, being cleansed by the blood of Christ, will present us pure and unblameable in the sight of God.

Let me therefore now proceed, in the

IVth and last place, to consider, what great motives might be urged to induce us to such a *sincere obedience*, as I have been now insisting upon; and how necessary it is for us, let it be thought ever so difficult, to serve God as I have here described, *with a perfect heart and willing mind: For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.* And,

1. Consider the God whom we are thus to serve, is a God of infinite knowledge, as the text tells us; *he searcheth the hearts of men, and understandeth all the imaginations of*

of their most secret thoughts. He is intimately acquainted with, and sees clearly every inclination of the soul; he knows every private design and intention of the mind far better than we do ourselves: And, how *vain* and *absurd* then must it be, to think of putting him off with *false hypocritical* pretences, when he requires a true and sincere obedience? It is the great prerogative of God to search the heart and try the reins, to discern the inmost recesses of the human soul; for there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight; all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. How *impious* must it be, to attempt to impose upon an all-knowing God, by a feigned and partial obedience? Men may be deceived by *shews* and disguises, but God will *not be mocked*; he *understands* and sees through *all the imaginations of the heart*, he requires truth and sincerity in the inner parts, and nothing is more detestable to him than hypocrisy and guile. How many dreadful woes are denounced by Christ our judge, against the Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! And sure, the Christian will not be more mildly treated, since his hypocrisy is the more inexcusable; because, the *Jewish* religion seemed to insist much on outward ceremonies and performances,
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but that of Christ demands principally, inward purity and sincerity of heart.

Let us then revolve frequently in our minds this one great truth, that God searcheth all hearts, and knows all things in the world; this will make us afraid and ashamed to flatter or dissemble with him, or serve him otherwise than with a *perfect heart*, and *willing mind*.

2. Consider farther the present *glorious reward* of our service, and the *misery* and punishment of our disobedience: *If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. If thou delight in the Lord*, says the Psalmist, *he will give thee thy heart's desire*. Religion is the great *improvement* of human nature, the *sole joy* and *happiness* of man; though we have nothing, *we possess every thing*, that is truly desirable, if we have the love and favour of God; and, if we lose this, if we forsake the paths of virtue, we lose all our satisfaction and quiet; though we have every good thing this world can afford, yet, we have really nothing, we shall *enjoy* nothing, but are miserable and undone for ever: *If thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever*. And therefore,

3. *Lastly,*

3. *Lastly*, and to conclude: Since we know what it is, to *know* and *serve* God, and are fully informed of the things which concern our everlasting peace, and which is the way that leads to it; let us remember our Lord's admonition, *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

We know the work we have to do, what kind of service God requires, and that our happiness consists entirely in our obedience to the will of God. Let this then be the main employment of our lives, the continual study and delight of our souls; and, take we care that we do every thing with purity of intention, and not endeavour to impose upon God with *outward* performances, instead of *real* duties: Let us devote ourselves with all humility and sincerity to his service, employ all our talents to his honour; and then may we hope to hear that joyful sentence, *Well done, good and faithful servant, &c.*

S E R M O N X I.

The PLEASURE *of* RELIGION.

P R O V. iii. 17.

*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all
her paths are peace.*

IT seems to be the secret opinion of some, as if religion deprived men entirely of all the *present* delights of life; as if all its pleasures were at a *great distance*, and not to be expected till we come into another world. But this is a very false accusation, and was invented, no doubt, by the grand deceiver of souls, to misrepresent the ways of virtue, as rough and unpleasant, and to entice men, by the imaginary pleasures of sin, into the broad paths of real misery. For we may appeal not only to the experience of those, who have made any considerable progress in religion, who
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are the best, and indeed, the only judges in this case, but also to the reason of every sober person, whether its precepts have not the most *natural* tendency to promote both our outward comfort, and inward happiness. Does it not direct us to the best means of obtaining a plentiful subsistence in the world, and crown men with health, riches and honour? Does it not exalt the soul, and improve all its faculties, enlighten the *understanding*, refine and regulate the *affections*, and conduct the man in such happy courses, as tend immediately to the dignifying and ennobling his nature? Above all, does it not discover and put him in possession of that grand secret, that chief ingredient of temporal felicity, without which, the largest portion of wealth and honour is but a burden and disquiet; I mean, a *contented mind*; a blessing that belongs to the very essence of *religion*, and can never be obtained, but by the sincere practice of it? Now, contentment has happiness in the very notion of it: *Godliness* with *contentment*, (for they always go together) is *great gain*; the man that has this virtue is happy in the *lowest* state of life, whereas without it, he is miserable in the *highest*.

Religion therefore, on this single account, must be esteemed the best instrument

ment of worldly happiness; as it inspires that *heavenly disposition* of mind, which alone can give us a true relish of all *sublunary* delights.

One of the great observations against the Christian religion, and what deters too many from it, is the notion of the rigour and severity of its precepts; as if it obliged men to live a *sower, uncomfortable* life, and had nothing in it but *sadness* and *melancholy*. But if we believe Christ, the author of it, it is quite otherwise: *Take my yoke upon you,* says he, *and ye shall find rest.* And that we might not be frightened with this emblem, he subjoins immediately, *My yoke is easy, my burden is light,* Matt. xi. 30. *His commandments,* says the apostle, *are not grievous,* 1 John v. 3. Not grievous in themselves, or to such as love God; they are grievous only to those who take delight in sin. It is a sensual heart, that makes religion a grievance, and the love of vice, that makes obedience a burden. For, *great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them:* In the service of God is perfect freedom. There is nothing conduceth so much to the real happiness of mankind as the practice of virtue.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Her ways, that is, the ways of wisdom, virtue or religion,
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which are all *synonymous* terms in holy Scripture, and used by the Holy Ghost, to shew us wherein consists the true felicity and *wisdom* of man.

In pursuance of which argument, for the honour and defence of religion, I shall endeavour to make good the following propositions.

I. That religion denies men no real pleasure.

II. That it contributes much to the attainment and true enjoyment of every real pleasure.

III. That it hath many pleasures peculiar to itself, which nothing else can give us.

IV. *Lastly*, That these are infinitely to be preferred before all the *pretended pleasures* of sin; so that if compared with *these*, they deserve not the name of pleasure. And,

I. I say, *religion denies men no real pleasure*: It only moderates the appetites and affections, restrains men from excess and intemperance in the use of God's creatures; which rather *heightens* than diminishes the pleasure men take in them; for temperance
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and moderation makes every enjoyment the sweeter and more entertaining, whereas by *excess*, it grows into *satiety* and a *burden*; there is no *delight* so innocent, but excess makes it sinful, and consequently turns it into a pain: Nor is there any pleasure a wicked man enjoys *by his sin*, but a good man may enjoy *without sin*, and find greater satisfaction than the other in the enjoyment of it.

For, further, religion is so far from lessening the enjoyments of the world, that it refines and sanctifies the use of them to us, and infuses a *sweetness* into them, which none but a good man can extract from them; the want of which, is, what makes the most exquisite pleasures insipid, *and the heart of the wicked, in the midst of laughter, sorrowful*. I confess, there are some things enjoined in the Gospel, that seem *difficult* and *disagreeable* at first view; such as *repentance*, mortification of sin, and taking up the cross; and yet, even *these* are attended with comfort and delight.

1. Repentance, truly, at first, brings sorrow and bitterness; it is an afflicting the soul, and occasions an anguish and terror in the mind, but how soon are these black clouds blown over, and succeeded by the serene, enlivening light of God's reconciled

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countenance! *Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning; joy inexpressible, not only in the sinner's heart, but in heaven too, the very angels rejoicing at the conversion of one sinner.*

And now, what can be more comfortable than to *repent*? What more fitting and desirable than to undo what has been done amiss? What more *delightful* than to be conscious of the divine reconciliation and pardon, to hear angels rejoicing, and Christ speaking peace, *Son be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven?*

2. As for *mortification of sin*, which is called the *cutting off a right hand, plucking out a right eye*, this seems hard to flesh and blood; and yet, to sober reason, it appears *eligible* notwithstanding, and to *mortify* lust, is not so painful as to *indulge* it. For, is it not a great satisfaction, to overcome the most potent, malicious, and worst of enemies? Such are our lusts, they *war against the soul*; they ruin and destroy the best part of man; they are false friends, that is, the basest of enemies under the shew of friendship; and therefore, the discovery and subduing of them, must needs be matter of joy and triumph.

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3. As for bearing the cross, a good man finds pleasure in this; the first Christians rejoiced, that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ, Acts v. 41. And, St. Paul says, he took pleasures in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in distresses, in persecutions for Christ's sake, 2 Cor. xii. 10. And truly, had they not good reason to rejoice and be exceeding glad, when Christ told them, Great was their reward in heaven. These, now, are the most severe, the most discouraging duties in Christianity; and yet, attended with an *unspeakable satisfaction*, as all that have tried them can attest: And therefore, he that has never yet repented of, has not endeavoured to mortify his sins, or bore the cross, hath so many distinct pleasures yet to come, vastly greater than any he ever knew before. Nor does religion exclude, us from any of the *innocent comforts* of life it forbids only *sinful* pleasures, such as we cannot taste of without sin, and such are but *false* and *deceitful*. For, as the Heathen moralist excellently observed, nothing is profitable but what is honest; so it may, with equal truth, be affirmed, nothing is *truly pleasant* but what is so, because every thing that is not so, leaves a *sting* and *pain* behind it.

Thus, as religion, in its most severe injunctions, denies men nothing that may conduce to their real comfort, so,

II. It contributes to the attainment and true enjoyment of every real *pleasure*. There are some *general* blessings in life so *necessary*, that by the loss of any *one*, we lose the satisfaction of all others; such as *health, liberty, security* from evil. *Health* is the foundation of all pleasure, without which we *enjoy* nothing; but is not this best promoted and preserved by the practice of virtue? Does not this forbid all intemperance and excess, all inordinate lusts and commotions of mind, which are the great impediments to health, the springs and causes of most of the diseases that rage among mankind? Will not excess in eating or drinking destroy the best constitution? And no less pernicious are those violent transports of anger, hatred, envy, sorrow, that we see men run into; they put the body out of its natural order, raise a ferment in the blood, and lay the seeds of sickness and distempers. Now, religion enjoins a meekness of spirit, a temperance both in body and mind, and keeps the soul in a quiet and composed serenity: It teaches men to be *cheerful* under affliction, and content in every state of life; and, by this means, is
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that promise fulfilled, *Prov. iii. 7, 8. The fear of the Lord and departing from evil, shall be health to thy navel and marrow to thy bones.*

And, does not experience attest the same? Who are they that enjoy the longest lives and soundest health? Are they not such as are regular, sober, temperate in their manners, most free from those *destructive* passions of anger, revenge, covetousness, ambition? A remarkable instance of which we have in *Moses*, of whom it is said, that though he was exceeding old, one hundred and twenty years, yet *his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated*, *Deut. xxxiv. 7.* which may be ascribed, among other causes, to the temperance of his body and constant meekness of his mind, it being particularly said of him, *Numb. xii. 3. that he was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth.* And then, as for that patient, chearful spirit, which supports a man under all disasters, is not this the genuine effect of true virtue? And does not the *merry heart do good like a medicine?* *Prov. xv. 13.* Is it not the best thing in the world, to dispel that anxiety and care which *breaks a man's spirit, and makes it stoop?* *Chap xvii. 22.* And as our bodily health, so does our liberty, and our security in all our concerns, depend on the observance of our duty: *For*

whoſo hearkeneth unto me, ſays Wiſdom, ſhall dwell ſafely, and ſhall be quiet from fear of evil, Prov. i. 33. When a man's ways pleaſe the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.

And, what is generally the cauſe of men's ſuffering in this reſpect, but their own *unjuſt, illegal* actions, which render them obnoxious to the puniſhment of priſons and fetters, to the *loſs* of liberty, goods and life? Would they be honeſt and diligent in their occupations, not *covet* or *piſfer* other men's goods; would they be *meek* and *charitable*, and mind their own buſineſs, they need not fear the laſh of public juſtice: For, *Who will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?*

And, as there is no pleaſure, no comfort, one can deſire in this life, but what religion is the beſt means to procure; ſo, there is none but what it helps us to the true enjoyment of, *none* indeed we can properly enjoy without it: For it is this alone, that teaches a man how to enjoy good in all his labours, how to ſweeten the croſſes and diſappointments of life, how to *take his portion of pleaſure, and rejoice in his labour*, as the wiſe man expreſſeth it, *Eccleſ. v. 19. Be cauſe God anſwereth him in the joy of his heart, ver. 20. For though a man have riches, wealth and honour, and want nothing for his ſoul*

soul that he desireth; yet, if God giveth him not power to enjoy it, what profit hath he? He does but labour for the wind; this is vanity, and it is an evil disease, chap. vi. 2. But, that a man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of his labour, this is the gift of God, chap. ii. 26. But then,

III. As the practice of religion is the best means for the attainment and true enjoyment of every real pleasure, so it hath many peculiar to itself, which nothing else can give. *This* will administer consolations, when we find *none* any where else: The sensual man is beholden to the *vine*, the *olive*, to the *field*, or the *stall*, and when these fail, all his pleasures fail; but, as the prophet says, *Tho' the fig-tree shall not blossom, nor shall there be fruit in the vines: Tho' the fields yield no meat, the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls, Hab. iii. 17. Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, &c.*

Here you see, when all the streams of this world's happiness be cut off, the good man has still a never-failing spring of delight; *Yet, will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.* A sensual spirit loves sensual pleasures, and esteems these the greatest, because he knows no better; but the good man hath many *intellectual* delights,

which flow from the testimony of a good conscience, and the communion of God's holy spirit, infinitely surpassing the *best* this world can afford; and, these are his own *peculiar* treasure; no thief can rob him, *no stranger intermeddletb with his joy*, Prov. xiv. 10.

1. A spiritual communion with God, consists in loving, and obeying God, in *walking with him*, as *Enoch* did, in a holy conformity to his will; doing what he commands, abstaining from what he forbids. *Truly, our fellowship*, says the apostle, *is with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ*, 1 John i. 3. And what is the consequence of such a communion? *He that loveth me*, says Christ, *shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself unto him*, John xiv. 21. *We will come unto him, and make our abode with him*, ver. 23. These expressions denote some special presence of God with such men, some *extraordinary* communications of his holy spirit, which cannot but fill the soul with delight ineffable, and make the religious *rejoice in the Lord always*. And then, 2. Besides this spiritual communion with God, and the sense of divine favour, he has another spring of delight from the *consciousness* of his own innocence; this is very properly termed a *continual*

tinual feast, such as will admit of no disturbance or interruption: For, as nothing in the world can give it, so it is not in the power of any thing here to take it away: *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace*, says the Prophet, *whose mind is stayed on thee*, Isa. xxvi. 3. *Delight thou in the Lord, and he shall give thee thy heart's desire*: If a man has the satisfaction of a quiet conscience, he wants no other to make him happy. *A good man is satisfied from himself*, Prov. xiv. 14. This gives him acquiescence of mind, and confidence towards God: *If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God*: This will support us in the midst of danger, *Tho' I walk thro' the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil*: This gives courage in the hour of death, applause and triumph in the day of judgment: This preserves a man under the greatest distresses of life, it made *Paul* and *Silas* sing praises in the prison, and the primitive martyrs triumph in the flames. *As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing*, 2 Cor vi. 10. A good conscience sets a man above the reach of every thing that can make our lives uncomfortable; there is no affliction, but this can *over-balance*: When in decrepit age a man can find no delight in other things, when the senses decay, *the grinders are few, and the appetite ceaseth*, this will be

a never-failing comfort; this gives him a heaven upon earth, and is one principal part of that happiness we expect in heaven. In a word, next to the society of saints and angels, next to the beatific vision, is a *good conscience*, which is the peculiar treasure of the religious.

And now, I may appeal, as I did before, not only to the reason, but the experience and observation of every considering man, whether those who are most virtuous, do not take the most pleasure even in the present life? Whether those, who regulate and restrain their desires, mortify their unruly appetites, who keep within the golden medium of virtue, avoid the extremes of vice, and thereby preserve themselves from *guilt* and *fear*, which sour the minds of men; whether *these*, I say, are not really the *most happy* of men? Are not those pleasures, which a man can reflect upon without remorse and pain, the most *eligible* and desirable of all others? Are not those intellectual delights, which flow from the consciousness of well-doing, much better than mere sensual amusements? Can all the enjoyments in the world afford such a *solid*, lasting pleasure, as the doing of one good action, such as men must applaud and commend, such as God will approve and reward? Can any thing be *more agreeable* to a generous mind, than
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to *assist* his neighbour, be *grateful* to his benefactors, faithful to his friends, and to *overcome evil with good*.

What can more contribute, I say, to the *real happiness* of man, to his present or future welfare, than the sincere practice of virtue, the constant exercise of religion? *Whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

S E R M O N X I I .

*The PLEASURES of VIRTUE and
VICE compared, &c.*

P R O V. i i i . 17.

*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all
her paths are peace.*

PLEASURE is the most attractive bait with all sorts of men, and as the devil has made this a temptation to sin, so the Holy Ghost has, with much more reason, made it an incitement to virtue: *Her ways are ways of pleasantness.*

One great objection against a religious course of life, is the opinion, as if it *restrained* men from all the delights of this world, and made their lives melancholy and uncomfortable; but now, if it should appear, that a virtuous life is much more pleasant,

pleasant, even in this world, than a life of sin, then this objection falls to the ground; and it must needs be a powerful argument to persuade men to be religious.

Tho' God does not propose, nor do good men expect the pleasures of this life, as the *final rewards* of virtue; yet if it can administer more delights than we can enjoy from vice, it must needs make men abhor and forsake sin, and walk in the paths of religion, which can supply us with present, as well as eternal felicity.

It has been proved in my former discourse, that *religion*, (or *virtue*, which is the same,)

I. Denies men no real pleasure. But,

II. That it contributes to the attainment and true enjoyment of every thing that is really pleasant and desirable. And,

III. That it hath many pleasures peculiar to itself, which nothing else can afford. I shall now,

IV. Endeavour to shew, from several instances, that the pleasures of religion are infinitely better and greater, than all the *pretended* pleasures of sin; so that if compared with those, they deserve not the name of pleasure.

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It is true, we hear men sometimes talk of the pleasures of sin, but, I believe, upon examination, they will be found to be *impostures* and *delusions* upon us. However, we will suppose them at present to be *real*, and not pretended pleasures, as I have called them; and then, upon comparison, let us enquire, which ought to be chosen and preferred, by such as would consult their present happiness and satisfaction in the world. And,

1. The pleasures of sin are *sensual*, *mean*, and *vile*; they gratify only the flesh, and please the brutal part of man; the more we indulge ourselves in them, the further we go off from *humanity*; for which reason, some of the heathen philosophers declaimed against all *sensual pleasure*, as beneath the dignity of a rational creature, and unworthy their pursuit; for, say they, when God hath made us *men*, why should we act like beasts, or chuse to feed on husks with swine, when we might live upon the best our father's house can afford?

Sensual pleasures, therefore, are degrading, dishonourable, as being *much inferior* to us; whereas those of religion are sublime, suitable to our rank and dignity, they gratify and ennoble the soul, and shew we have a better taste and capacity than the creatures *below* us. The excellency of every creature
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consists in acting up to the dignity and order of its *species*; and the perfection of a rational being is in the right use of his understanding, in the resemblance and imitation of God, who is above all things.

2. The pleasures of sin are *false* and *deceitful*, they are not in the *enjoyment*, what they seem to be in *expectation*; but, like the apples of *Sodom*, they are beautiful to the *eye*, and upon the *touch*, turn to ashes. The apostle bids us beware of the *deceitfulness* of sin, *Heb. iii. 13.* He calls it *deceitful*, because it allureth the soul by a vain hope of enjoying that satisfaction from it, which it can never afford; for sin presents itself to the mind, otherwise than it *really* is; it always puts on a mask of pleasure, and, like some great men in the world, makes many *large promises*, but no *performance*; the sinner expects a great deal from it, and finds it nothing more than a lying vanity; for the *pleasure of sin is but a dream*, and *the folly of fools, deceit*, *Prov. xiv. 8.* The temptation whereby the devil seduced our first parents, was by a fruit, *beautiful to the eye, and desirable to make one wise*, *Gen. iii. 6.* *And God doth know*, says the serpent, *that in the day ye eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*, *ver. 5.* But here was a palpable deceit and equivocation, and
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what was the *event*? They commit the sin, and their *eyes were opened* indeed, but they saw nothing, besides their sin and shame; they *knew good and evil* too, but it was only that they had lost the good, and entailed evil on themselves and their posterity after them. Thus the father of sin promises, men pleasure, but pays them in sorrow and vexation.

If there be any kind of pleasure in sin, it proceeds only from a deluded imagination, or a corrupted judgment; as a *vitiated* stomach can relish those things that would be nauseous to a *good* one, so the wicked man that has lost his reason and senses, takes *delight* in what will be his *aversion*, whenever he *comes to himself*. For, as the Prophet has described him, *he feedeth on ashes, a deceived heart hath turned him aside*; he has no more use of his discerning faculties, whereby he should find out his mistake, than a mere *natural*, or an idiot; so that *he cannot deliver his soul, or say, is there not a lie in my right hand?* Isaiah xlv. 20.

But now, the pleasures of religion are true and substantial; as in vice, we expect more satisfaction than we find, so in religion, we find more than it was possible to have expected; *this* never deceives, but always exceeds our hopes; for *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can the heart of man conceive*

ceive the things God hath prepared for them that love him. It is true the joys of the kingdom of God, are not *meat and drink*, or sensual entertainments, but they are much better, *righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*, Rom. xiv. 17.

3. The pleasures of sin are *infamous*, and bring men to *shame* and contempt. *What fruit had ye*, says the apostle, *in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?* Whatever we may think of sin before, it soon makes us ashamed, after the commission of it, not only as we are baffled and disappointed in our high-flown expectations from it, but also, as we are conscious of having done what is mean, base, *unbecoming*, and *forbidden*. Were there any spark of *grace* and *ingenuity*, the conscience of sin must needs put a man to the blush: *O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face unto thee*, Ez. ix. 6. *My sins take hold of me*, says David, *that I am not able to look up*. None but the most abandoned wretch will boast of his sins, and if he does, his own conscience at the same time tells him, he does but *glory in his shame*; and such he will find it, when he comes before the judgment-seat of Christ, when he shall be hissed at with scorn by men and angels, by the whole assembly of creatures, and eternally

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banished from the society of the best and noblest of beings.

But now, the pleasures of religion are becoming and honourable; as sin is the worst of *folly*, so virtue is the best sort of wisdom, and wisdom is the most honourable thing in the world; *the wise inherit glory*, but *shame is the promotion of fools*. A good man may be scoffed at and insulted, but he can never be ashamed; for shame is the consequence of an indecent, vicious behaviour, and where there is no conscience of guilt, there is no place for shame. The righteous therefore is bold as a lion, and shall never be *confounded*. Guilt makes men tremble, even in the height of their pleasures, because they are sensible they have displeased God, and disobliged their own consciences; they have done what is forbidden and condemned by the *eternal law* and *reason* of things; and when a man's own mind upbraids him, when the hand of divine justice is hanging over his head, just ready to strike him into the abyss of hell, what delight can such a one take in his sin? Is not the *pain* and anguish of this, much greater than the pleasure? And are not wicked men forced oftentimes to confess as much, under the conviction of grace, or on their dying beds? How often have they then cried out against the cursed allurements of
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of Sin, and called themselves the *greatest* of fools, for being *cheated* and deceived by them?

But now, the pleasures of religion are *lawful*, and therefore *undisturbed*; we are so far from being forbidden to take pleasure in religion, that it is commanded as a duty, *Delight thou in the Lord*, Psalm xxxvii. 4. *Rejoice in the Lord alway*, Phil. iv. 4. It is the great praise and commendation of a good man, that his *delight is in the law of his God*, Psalm i. 2. And, what should disturb or interrupt those spiritual delights we enjoy in the paths of virtue? They are free from every *bitter alloy*, not soured by remorse *within*, not liable to be ravished from us by outward violence, by the fraud or malice of men.

All her paths are peace; even that peace which passeth all understanding, and admits of no interruption. Whatever *pleasure* wicked men may sometimes *think* they enjoy, they can have no peace, no lasting satisfaction; but, religion gives men both *pleasure* and *peace*, peace with God, and peace with their own conscience. Such *great peace have they who love thy law! And nothing shall offend them*, Psalm cxix. 165.

4. The pleasures of sin are *distracting* and *vexatious*: One lust is oftentimes contrary

to another, in gratifying one, we disoblige another; and, the *predominant* lust will be sure to be humoured, though at the expence and disappointment of *all* the *rest*. Thus, a man is forced sometimes to sacrifice his covetousness to his pride, his luxury to ambition, &c. If he serve the one, he must *thwart* the other, and this must create distraction and uneasiness in the mind; because it is impossible to please all parties at the same time: But in ways of virtue it is not so: there is a perfect harmony and agreement between all the duties of religion, he that practices one, does not contradict another; indeed he that would be truly religious must practice *all*, there being an *inviolable chain* that ties them all together.

And this makes the pleasures of religion so much better than those of sin, because they are consistent with each other; they do not distract the mind, do not *drag* a man different ways, but may be *all* enjoyed at the same time without intrenching on *any one*; there is no opposition or contrariety between them, they all help forward, and promote and make each other the more easy and delightful.

5. The pleasures of sin are *unsatisfying at best*, as being only adapted to the body, and fitted to the amusement of the flesh
and

and senses. The soul can take no delight in them; for that is a spirit, and must be gratified with *spiritual* entertainments: But in the pleasures of sin, it is only *half the man*, and the *worst half* too, that is pleased: The body may as well feed upon a shadow, as the soul upon *sensual* delights. And this is the reason why those that enjoy *most* of the pleasures of sin, are still observed, notwithstanding, to be always hunting out for *new* ones; a plain confession, that they want *something more*, that they are not contented or completely satisfied in what they enjoy.

Whereas the pleasures of religion are completely satisfactory to the *whole* of man, they answer every faculty, and fill up every capacity of the soul: *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled*; they shall be abundantly satisfied: *For thou givest them of the river of thy pleasures*, Psalm xxxvi. 8.

6. The pleasures of sin are extremely hurtful and pernicious to our present well-being: They deprive us of three of the most valuable blessings of life, our *health*, *reputation* and *estate*; they destroy the health, as they breed distempers, pains, and incurable diseases in the body; there is no sin indulged or gratified, no, not those spiritual

ones of pride, revenge, malice, &c. but they sow *the seeds* of disorder and sickness in the constitution.

And, they ruin a man's good name, which, in effect, is his *bread*, and *much better than riches*, or even than life itself: For a man had better be dead than live in infamy and disgrace. Now, sin is the *greatest disgrace* that can possibly befall a man: It is not so shameful to *want* reason as to *abuse* it, and therefore the sinner is more *contemptible* than the idiot.

And then, they are *expensive*, and waste a man's estate; some men spend more in one day, in the gratifying a vicious inclination, than would keep a poor family throughout the year; and such, truly, deserve to be reduced to what is commonly their fate, to a *morsel of bread*, to *poverty* and *rags*.

Thus, what *Solomon* has said of one sin, is generally true of every other, *Her house inclines to death, and her paths to the dead: Who so goeth after her, is as an ox going to the slaughter, or a fool to the correction of the stocks.* He finds his punishment in his sin: *For a dart shall strike through his liver, as a bird that hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life,* Prov. vii. 23.

But now, in the pleasures of religion, there is no danger, no fear of mischief, or
misery

misery in the end; they neither impair the health, reputation, or estate; they improve and preserve every one of these things to us. The practice of virtue is *health to the bones*, and *doth good like a medicine*: *Length of days are in her right hand; by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life increased*, Prov. ix. 11. It giveth a *cheerful countenance*, a sound constitution, strength of body, and ease of mind. It will *exalt a man to honour*, it is an *ornament of grace to the head*, and *better than chains of gold about the neck*. It does not diminish, but rather increase the substance; for tho' it require liberality and almsgiving, yet it calls but for a *part*, such a portion only, as we can lawfully spare, and then it helps to save and improve what remains; as it puts us under, and entitles us to, the special favour and providence of Almighty God.

7. Again, the pleasures of sin are short, transitory, and precarious; they depend on the perishing creatures, which are corruptible and fading, and continually passing away. *How soon is the candle of the wicked put out?* and leaves a smell offensive behind it, *Prov. xxiv. 20. The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment*, Job xx. 5. therefore the

wise man compares it to the *crackling of thorns under a pot*, Eccl. vii. 6. where there is much noise, and little heat, and that soon extinguished. The rich man in the Gospel reckoned upon many years of pleasure to come, but alas! it happened to be but a few hours; *this night shall thy soul be required of thee.*

The pleasures of wicked men at furthest, cannot last longer than their *life*; and many times, indeed, not *so long*: Sometimes they die from them, before they die themselves; sickness, pain, or a worm in the conscience, can soon extinguish these joys, so as never to revive again; but if these things do not, death most certainly will; when *that comes*, farewell all the delights of sin for ever, nothing will then remain but the *bare remembrance*, which will only give a sting and a scourge to their miseries.

If these pleasures then do not leave *us*, we are sure in a very short time to leave *them*. Whereas, the pleasures of religion are permanent, fixed and durable, they last as long as the soul itself, they flow from a river, whose springs never fail, from a fountain ever running, and yet inexhaustible.

8. *Lastly*, The pleasures of sin have but a sorrowful end, for the end of it is death.
This

This is the natural effect, the *necessary unavoidable* consequence of a vicious life. *He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption. Stolen waters, how sweet soever in the mouth, must turn into gall and wormwood in the belly; and one may say to the sinner, as Abner did to Joab, knowest thou not, that it will be bitterness in the latter end?* 2 Sam. ii. 26. The ways of sin are broad, and seem smooth and pleasant, but they *lead down to the chambers* of hell, where there is punishment without *pity*, misery without mercy, sorrow without succour, imprisonment without hopes of release, and torment without end.

This is all the wages sin can pretend to, a little present pleasure and eternal pain. But the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness now, and peace at the last. *Mark the perfect, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.* When other pleasures end in horror and anguish, these will never expire, are always new and but beginning, and will, at length, procure us an admission into God's presence, *where is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore*, Psalm xvi. 11. So that upon the whole, we must conclude, as Solomon did, after such an enquiry into *wisdom*, and
madness

madness and folly, as we have now made, that upon a just comparison between them, *wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness*: And God grant, we may act accordingly, for our own sakes, and to the honour of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

S E R M O N X I I I .

The T R U T H *of the* C H R I S T I A N
R E L I G I O N *from its* S U C C E S S .

A C T S x i x . 20 .

*So mightily grew the word of God, and
prevailed!*

AS the Christian religion doth, upon many accounts, proclaim God to be its author; so, it evidently shews, it had the immediate hand and assistance of God himself, in that wonderful victory and success it obtained over all its adversaries.

Some remarkable instances of which, the divine writer has given us in this compendious History of the *Acts* of the Apostles; though, indeed, more ample proofs we may discern, in that *large progress* it made in the apostles days; so that even *then*, it had spread itself over the whole
Roman

Roman empire, that is, over all the known parts of the world. This book of the *Acts* contains a brief narration only of the first rise and infancy of the Gospel, for about the space of thirty-two years, from its first appearance in the world; and yet, we may here find many surprising tokens and presages of its future glory and increase.

It was a very astonishing sight to any considering person, to see three thousand souls converted by St. *Peter's* first sermon, *chap. ii. ver. 41.* who but just before had hid himself for fear, and was known to be a man of no celebrated parts for learning or eloquence: To see the great city of *Samaria* converted by *Philip* a deacon, *chap. viii. ver. 6.* in spite of all the arts and policy of *Simon Magus*: To see the same person baptize the eunuch, treasurer to queen *Candace*, whereby the gospel was divulged into the remote parts of *Ethiopia*: To see St. *Paul* converting the great deputy *Sergius Paulus*, notwithstanding the opposition of another powerful forcerer, striking the one with blindness, while he opened the eyes of the other.

To behold many of these very forcerers bring all their books of art, amounting in value to 50,000 *pieces* of silver, and burn them before all men (as we are told in the verse immediately preceding the text): To see

see these, who had acquired such prodigious gain by their *magical* curious arts, renounce them all for the poverty of the gospel, was so stupendous and amazing a thing as was sufficient to raise the admiration of all the world. *So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed!*

And, what conclusion, now, are we to draw from this strange and surprising success of the Christian religion at its first publication in the world, but that it is a very convincing argument of its truth and divinity?

And, that it is so, I shall endeavour, in the present discourse, to make evident from these two considerations:

- I. Because the doctrine it taught was, in all respects, directly opposite to the general temper and disposition of mankind. And,
- II. It was every where persecuted and opposed with the utmost malice, by all the reigning powers in the world.

If these two points can be made out (as they are no other than *real facts*) hence it must follow, that it was propagated by the immediate aid and concurrence of a superior power,

power, and consequently, was a doctrine of undoubted truth and certainty.

I am sensible, it may be said, success in itself, is no certain argument of the truth of a cause, since many false opinions and impostures have prevailed in the world, and many acts of injustice and usurpation have been sometimes crowned with success: But then, we must observe, this has never happened but when they have been supported by worldly power and violence, or fell in with the humour and inclination of the people; and therefore, in the case of Christianity, which fought against the united powers of the world and the natural prejudices of mankind, it must be admitted as a plain demonstration of its divinity, that it was assisted by the hand of God, since it so gloriously triumphed over all opposition. And,

I. Then, ~~I say~~, the doctrine of the gospel was directly contrary to the general temper and disposition of mankind.

And this, both as to those matters it revealed as *articles of faith*, and those it enjoined as *rules of life* and practice; the *one* seemed irrational and hard to be *believed*, the *other* severe and impossible to be *obeyed*.

As to those points the gospel revealed as matters of faith, as *the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, &c.* these were,

were, some of them, as much above the apprehensions, as contrary to the received opinions of mankind; who, we may be sure, would not be very forward to embrace those doctrines, which contradicted the fixed principles of their education, and the established religion they were bred up in.

It is too melancholy and visible a truth, how tenacious men are of those principles they imbibe in their infancy; when once an opinion has insinuated itself into the tender mind, *like a strong man armed, it keeps its place*, and beats off every thing that comes to disturb it. Thus it is in *religion* as in *civil titles*, that religion which gets possession of us at our first coming into the world, has a great advantage of all others; it takes a firmer hold of us, and, as we are prepossessed in its favour, is very difficult to be removed.

Now we cannot conceive, but that those persons who were born, bred up, and lived constantly under the superstition and idolatry of Paganism, must be strongly devoted to it, and have an irreconcilable aversion to a religion, that came purposely to destroy it; and, the stronger the prejudice is that grows up from education and custom, the greater must be the power and efficacy of the gospel, that could so easily conquer it, and bring under the *headstrong imaginations of men*

men to the obedience of Christ. If there be such a fatal bias upon the minds of men from the influence of education, (which atheistical men flatter themselves they make a mighty advantage of) this, we see, is so far from weakening the truth of Christianity, that, on the other hand, it is a strong confirmation of it; that it should obtain such universal success over the minds of men at its first preaching, when the most violent prejudices of education were against it.

If men are apt to be so *attached* to the principles they receive in their youth, and believe none true but those they have been educated in; there must, certainly, be some very extraordinary evidence and virtue in *that* religion, which could so soon pluck up these deeply rooted notions, and not only make men question the truth of them, but presently forsake them, for a religion in every respect most contrary to them.

Especially, when we consider, what other plausible pretences the heathen world then had, to keep them steadfast in the religion they were educated in, and to reject all others that might come in competition with it. For,

1. They conceived, their religion had *greater antiquity* than the Christian, and this they made a common objection against it; they

they pleaded the *prescription* and *authority* of past ages, they esteemed it a point of honour and wisdom to follow their forefathers, though into the grossest absurdities, never considering how often antiquity is attended with dimness of sight; and that, if we follow it with an implicit obedience, we are often betrayed into a ditch.

However, this was, as they thought, an unanswerable exception against Christianity, that it was a novel doctrine, something new and never heard of in any age or nation before: *Where was your religion*, said they, *before Jesus of Nazareth?* As some have since demanded of us Protestants, *where was your religion before Luther?* To both which, the same answer may be returned, *There, where no other religion is*, in the word of God.

2. Their religion was established likewise by human laws, and this was another prevailing reason why they should adhere to it: All innovations in religion were *then* forbid and punished, as tending to disturb the public peace, and overturn their laws and liberties.

Upon this account, we find, the primitive Christians were frequently indicted as factious and seditious persons, disturbers of the civil state, and enemies to the commonwealth; and

the preachers of it were watched with a very jealous eye, as men of some dark and evil designs.

When St. *Paul* preached at *Athens*, his first accusation was, that *he was a setter forth of strange Gods: Because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection*, Acts xvii. 18. And *Demetrius* at *Ephesus*, knew no better argument to stir up the people against him, than that his doctrine destroyed the *worship of Diana, whom all Asia, and the world adored*, chap. xix. 27. For this reason, they were often accused and condemned for sacrilege, because their religion tended to the subversion of the idolatrous temples and worship of the heathen Gods. Again, other laws were likewise in Force among the *Romans*, which obliged them to *sacrifice to Idols, for the safety of the Emperor, to swear by his Genius*, and worship him as God; a thing that, at length, was grown into a common custom among them, which, when their Christian subjects refused to comply with, they were, by law, condemned for treason and rebellion, and declared enemies to the civil government.

And now, when there were so many laws set as traps in the way, so that men could not profess themselves Christians, but they immediately incurred the *penalty* of a *premunire*, confiscation, imprisonment or death,
we

we cannot suppose, that many should embrace Christianity out of an *itch of novelty*, or on any light motive, when they were sure to run the utmost hazards by the profession of it.

Had the apostles been men of intrigue and design, who consulted their own ease and interest, they would have invented some nice distinctions and salvoes, (as the temporising *Gnosticks* did) to have evaded the penalty of the laws, by a gentle compliance with such practices as might prevent a prosecution; but they unanimously withstood all such idolatrous customs, though enjoined by law, and chose to obey God, though punished for it by the laws of men.

The weapons indeed, wherewith they encountered these corruptions in the heathen world, were not carnal; nor were they weak, but exceeding powerful, in that they obtained so absolute a victory over the prejudiced understandings and fleshly reasonings of men, as to make them renounce the worship of idols, and become chearful servants to the true God.

So divine a power there was in the Christian religion, that it *prevailed* not only against the inveterate prepossessions of education, but against a religion confirmed by a pretended antiquity, and supported by the severe sanction of human laws; even though

the doctrine it taught, seemed incredible and contrary to, because above the reason and understanding of men to conceive.

But yet, this was not all the difficulty it lay under; for to proceed: Some things it revealed and commanded to be believed, seemed incredible to, as being above the reach of human reason to comprehend.

Which must certainly make men not over credulous in believing them, and shews, they had the fullest evidence that they were revealed from heaven. Every one, we may be sure, was ready to take all possible advantage against a religion, that did so little flatter the pride and ambition of human nature, and to despise what they could not understand. Indeed, the apostles frankly declared, there was no judging of the truth of their doctrines, by the principles of philosophy; for, the *natural man*, says St. Paul, that is, he that proceeds only upon the principles of mere reason, *cannot receive the things of the spirit, but they are foolishness unto him, because they are spiritually discerned*, that is, they are only to be understood by those that believe a divine inspiration; and such will think it no absurdity to believe them, though they infinitely transcend our reach and comprehension.

But now, at the first preaching of the gospel, how few of the wise philosophers,
and

and admirers of human learning, embraced it! The reason was, because it delivered many mysteries, which they never heard of, and demanded their belief in a way they were unacquainted with, that is, upon the authority of divine revelation; which, being so far different from their *common method* of teaching arts and sciences, they scoffed at and derided: *What will this babbler say?* said they to St. Paul, *when he preached Jesus, and the resurrection*, Acts xvii. 18. They expected, that every article of the Christian faith should be explained and enforced by the lame, imperfect rudiments of their schools; that the *Incarnation of Christ*, and *the resurrection of the dead*, should be proved by the maxims of human learning: As if the God of infinite wisdom would build his revelations on the *uncertain principles* of philosophy: Or, as if the authority of the divine lawgiver, so fully proved by miracles, were not sufficient to enforce a law, except a particular account (as to the *justice* and *equity* of the thing enjoined) were given to the dim-sighted reason of every individual person, that should be moved by *humour* and private interest to oppose it.

Yet these were the conditions upon which the gospel was to expect entertainment, from the then learned part of the heathen world; and, how impossible now had it

been for the preachers of it to have found any success in their undertaking, had there not sufficient evidence been given, that however strange and incredible the doctrine might seem, yet, it was to be believed, because sufficiently proved to be of *divine revelation*!

And, as those things the gospel revealed as matters of faith, were *above* the reason, and therefore *contrary to* the inclinations of men; so, were those precepts it enjoined as rules of life and practice.

The sum and design of Christianity as to men's lives, is, to take them off from their sins and from the world; which are two things, the hearts of men are most besotted to, and enslaved by, of all others; and they must first change their very natures, be *regenerate* and *born anew*, before they can be induced to break off their love and affection for these.

But now, the gospel enjoins us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, *Tit. ii. 12.* to depart from all iniquity; to *cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God, 2 Cor. vii. 1.* It enjoins the strictest purity of heart and life, and assures us, that we do but flatter and deceive ourselves, when we think to reconcile a wicked life with the hopes

hopes of future happiness: *For without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.*

And then, as for the things of this world, as riches, honours, &c. that men are so fond of, and take such indefatigable pains to acquire, the gospel bids us *turn away our eyes from these, as vanities: To lay up our treasures, not on earth but in heaven: To place our affections on things above, and look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, which are eternal:* Expressly declaring, that they who love this world, the love of the Father is not in them, 1 John ii. 14. and that *who so is a friend to the world, is an enemy to God.*

Thus, the whole scope and design of Christianity was manifestly to persuade men to renounce their sins, and live a holy and heavenly life; and, how should we think such multitudes of men, whose hearts were wedded to sin and the world, would so suddenly be converted from both, without a very full conviction of its Truth, and some supernatural power attending the doctrine preached to them!

Especially, considering into what an *abyss* of vice and profaneness the whole world was sunk, at the first appearance of the gospel; all orders and professions of men were corrupted, and degenerated into the lowest dregs of idolatry, lewdness, and immorality.

morality. For, as the apostle tells us, *Rom. i. 28.* God, as a just judgment on their depraved imaginations, gave them over to a *reprobate mind*, to work all uncleanness with greediness; *being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, covetousness*, and a dismal train of other abominable impieties, in which they not only indulged themselves; but even *took pleasure in those that did them.* And now, that such men, who had so long wallowed in sin, that it was become almost natural to them, should instantly be reclaimed from all their beloved lusts, abandon their habitual follies, and become truly virtuous and religious, was an undeniable token of some divine efficacy in the religion they had embraced.

And truly, among other reasons, I take this to be the principal, that astonished the minds, and turned the hearts of all sober persons to the embracing Christianity; when they saw what an admirable effect and influence it had on the hearts and lives of men.

The heathen philosophers, indeed, did justly complain of the little effect their instructions had upon the minds of their disciples, that they grew more *knowing*, but not more *virtuous*: But the Christian preachers taught not only with greater authority, but even *awed the soul* into a chearful obedience;

dience; the *convincing power* and *demonstration of the spirit*, by which they preached, made a greater and more lasting impression upon the hearers, than the thunder and lightening did on the *Jews* at mount *Sinai*.

As their *commission* was, to open the eyes of men, *to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God*; so, accordingly, they converted men, not only to the *doctrine* of Jesus Christ, but the imitation of his *example*; and Christians *then* were not more eminent for the *purity* of their *faith*, than for the *piety* and sobriety of their *lives*.

How wicked and profligate were the people of *Corinth* before their conversion! For when the apostle had taken notice of some of the vilest sinners in the world, he adds, *And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the spirit of our God*, 1 Cor. x. 2.

Now, the greater the wickedness of the Heathen world was, the greater was the power of the gospel that reformed it; the more violent any distemper be, the more malignant its nature, the greater is the virtue of the medicine that cures it.

It may be thought, perhaps, a matter of no great difficulty, to bring people from one speculation to another, because we are
not

not so apt to fall in love with our *opinions* as our *sins*; but then, to turn men on a sudden from their sensuality and licentiousness, to a life holy and unblameable; to draw them off from habitual sins to the habitual love of virtue, supposes an absolute change in their very natures and tempers, and in all the faculties of the soul; and consequently, must require some extraordinary power to produce it.

And, what could have made the Christian religion more venerable in the eyes of sober men, than that it was able to *tame* the most *unruly*, instruct the most ignorant, reclaim the most dissolute, and raise the most sordid, mean-spirited persons, to such a generous frame of mind, as to despise all the delights of life, and even the torments of death, for the sake of it.

Something, they must needs conclude, there was *in it*, above the *skill of art*, or *force of nature*; that it could so suddenly reform the profligate world, and reduce men from their accustomed follies, to a serious, sober and unblameable conversation.

Thus we have seen, how contrary the doctrine of Christ was, to the general inclinations of mankind, both as to matters of faith and practice; the one being as much *above* their comprehension, as the other, ungrateful and displeasing to their
sensual

ensual dispositions; and yet we see, notwithstanding, what a general success it had in the world, and what an absolute conquest it gained at last over the very hearts and thoughts of men; which plainly proves, it was propagated by no less than an *omnipotent* power.

But this will appear still more evident, if we consider,

II. The continual opposition and resistance it met with, from the strength and policy of its adversaries; so that it was every where *persecuted* with the utmost malice, by all the reigning powers of the world.

Had the gospel been only a politic contrivance of impostors, or some *cunningly devised fable*, to serve the interest or design of private persons, it had been impossible it should have long subsisted in the world, when it had such potent and subtle enemies always labouring to suppress it. The whole *Jewish nation*, to a man, were exasperated with the deepest rancour and bitterness against it, would lose no opportunity to stir up the people against the apostles, and did them all the mischief their wit or malice could invent. The *Roman emperors* looked on this new sect of Christians with a suspicious eye, and took all occasions to discountenance, to perplex and suppress them; and,
it

it is particularly recorded of two of them, *Julian* and *Dioclesian*, that they made it their *principal aim* and design, to root out and abolish the Christian religion.

There was *something*, then, very *peculiar* in Christianity, *something* in it certainly *above* the art and subtilty of impostors, that it was not only propagated *without* the aid of any civil power, but even *against* it, and got ground by the opposition it met with in the world; the first Christian emperor, who acted as *such* by protecting Christianity, not appearing, till it had been planted in most parts of the habitable world.

By which remarkable providence, God has plainly shewn us, that though the civil power, when lodged in the hands of a Christian prince, may be a great blessing and advantage to the Christian religion; yet, it stood not in need of any such secular arm, at its first publication in the world: It was entirely independent of, nay, continually clashing with the civil state, for three hundred years together: It stood the shock of ten general persecutions, which raged with the utmost cruelty and barbarity, till at last, by its own divine power, it surmounted the malice, and subdued the fury of its adversaries, and turned the heathen persecutors into Christian protectors.

And this it did, not by the strength of worldly weapons, not by enslaving men's
bodies

bodies for the saving their souls, not by the inhuman instruments of fire and sword, but by the sedate and peaceable methods of persuasion; by the endearments of plain and solid reason; by the mere dint of its own intrinsic truth and goodness.

The religion of Jesus Christ was not like that of the impostor *Mahomet*, which fought with the edge of the sword, and made its way through the world by *force and violence*.

No, the *weapons of our warfare*, says the apostle, *are not carnal*; their doctrine encreased and flourished from its own divine efficacy, it never thrived better than in the most barren soil, nor triumphed more, than when it suffered most; it never spread itself farther, than where it found the greatest opposition, nor fructified and prospered better, than when it was watered by the blood of its own *champions and martyrs*.

An undeniable demonstration of some miraculous power in it, that buoyed up its professors under the greatest miseries of life, and supported them with chearfulness, to bear the most exquisite torments of death!

And, what greater argument now could there be, to advance the honour of the Christian religion, or convince the world of the integrity of its professors, as well as its own truth and excellency, than to let
all

all the world see, that no penalties or terrors could ever make a Christian fly from his faith, but he would rather bid adieu to his life than his Saviour; that no force or policy of men or devils was able to withstand it, but that, at last, by its own peculiar strength, it mastered all its enemies, and over-ran the whole world.

So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed!

From what has been said, I only beg leave to draw an inference or two, and so conclude. ~~And,~~

1. From the prevailing increase and mighty progress of Christianity in the world, in spite of all opposition, (which, I hope, has been proved to be a strong confirmation of its divinity) we may perceive the inexcusable perverseness of our modern infidels, even above those in the early ages; since these have now seen an unquestionable and no less than miraculous evidence of its truth, which the others never did, and which, as it makes their sin the greater, must increase their eternal condemnation.

Our blessed Lord tells the *Jews*, John xv. 22. if he had not done among them, the works, no other did before, *they had not had sin*, that is, their sin in disbelieving him, had not been loaded with such aggravations,
had

had he not given them the fullest testimonies of a divine mission and authority; but *now*, says he, they have *no cloak for their sin*, no shadow of an excuse for their unbelief.

The same, I fear, may too justly be applied to those that now reject the gospel, after such clear conviction, such irrefragable evidence and demonstration of its divinity, not only from the first miracles that were wrought in confirmation of it, but also from that astonishing success and victory it has obtained in the world, which can be imputed to no other cause but the Almighty arm of divine providence.

2. From this prevailing success, which the Christian religion carried with it, at its preaching, over the minds and consciences of men, so as to turn them from their sins and follies, to a sober and virtuous life, we find too great cause to lament the deplorable decay of Christian piety in these degenerate ages of the church; and which, it is to be feared, has driven more into atheism and infidelity, than any defect of evidence, or suspicion of falshood in the Christian religion.

It is not the want of sufficient proof from reason, but of sufficient encouragement from the examples of its professors; that

that has made some despise and others reject the doctrines of Christianity.

A reflection, indeed, no less sad than surprising! that *that religion*, which at its first publication, should so strenuously prevail over the exorbitant appetites and passions of men, as to make them chearfully obey its strictest rules, and convert such numbers in so short a space, from being most *profane, profligate*, and *licentious*, to be most devout, temperate and sober in their conversations, should *now*, on the other hand, make so light an impression on the Christians of these later ages, that we have little more than a mere form and outside of godliness left among us.

Is not the Christian religion still the *same*? Its ordinances and institutions the same? For we have the same holy Spirit of God residing in the Church, and will, to the end of the world; the grace of God is not restrained, nor is our obligation to a sincere evangelical obedience in any respect lessened, the laws of the gospel being like their great author, without variableness, the same yesterday, to day, and for ever. As for the evidence of the truth of our religion, we have the greatest we can possibly have, since it has not only defeated all the power of the world, but has continued so long in it, against all the malicious stratagems of its most potent enemies to suppress it.

To

To what *fatal cause* then can we impute this so unaccountable degeneracy in the lives of Christians, when we have *all* possible helps and motives to virtue? but to our own *wilful neglect* of grace, and a *supine inadvertency* to the dictates of God's holy Spirit.

But to conclude: May we all be persuaded, as we regard our own eternal interest, as we would not be partakers in the dreadful guilt of infidels, so impartially to consider the divinity of our religion, as to observe its precepts in truth and sincerity.

May we strive to excel all other men in the sobriety of our lives, as well as the purity of our faith, that we may not be *condemn'd with those that profess they know God, and in works deny him*; but may submit to the happy influence of his grace here, that we may become worthy to be admitted into his glory hereafter.

S E R M O N X I V .

DIVINE ARITHMETIC; *or the ART*
and WISDOM of numbering our
DAYS.

P S A L M xc. 12.

*So teach us to number our days, that we may
apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

TH E author of this Psalm, from the contemplation of the *eternity* of God, takes occasion to lament the shortness and uncertainty of human life; *Lord, thou hast been our refuge, &c. before the mountains were brought forth, &c. thou art God from everlasting, and world without end. As for man, he is but as grass that flourishes in the morning, and in the evening is cut down and withered.*

And

And tho' indeed we have no just cause to complain of this, when we consider, it is not the *length*, but the *significancy* of life that is chiefly to be regarded; yet it must be owned, God has been pleased to cut short our time, and to lessen very much that number of years he allowed our forefathers. From 7 or 800, we are now sunk to 70 or 80, which, as the Psalmist observes, v. 10, is the utmost bounds of our pilgrimage on earth. One reason of which, among others, seems to be the sins and luxuries of latter ages. *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days pass away in thy wrath; we spend our years as it were a tale that is told,* ver. 8, 9.

God hath so ordered things, that sin, by the proper course of nature, shall tend to the shortening our lives; that as the meek-spirited and religious person shall possess the earth, by a long and happy life, and shall come to his grave in full age, as a shock of corn cometh in his season, Job v. 26. so the wicked and deceitful shall not live out half their days. And yet, notwithstanding, who regardeth the power of thy wrath? Who considereth, or is so truly sensible of thy displeasure, as to prevent it by a seasonable reformation; to forsake his sins, and apply himself to seek thy favour and reconciliation,

which yet is the only true wisdom, and ought to be the chief concern of man? *So teach us therefore, O Lord, to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

The frequent *consideration of our latter end*, though it be one of the most prudent things in life, is what most men love to put away from them, as an *evil and melancholy* speculation; there is no *glass less looked into* than that of our mortality; we studiously shun the thoughts of it, as if we could exempt ourselves from being mortal, by forgetting that we are so.

But what reason can we give for such a behaviour, or how can we justify it by the rules of prudence? Supposing death to be an *enemy*, and the greatest we are afraid of in the world, yet, surely, the looking thro' a perspective on the motions of an enemy, does not at all hasten his *approach* to us, it only puts us into a better readiness to receive him; and therefore, neither young nor old have any just cause to *dislike such a prayer as this, or abhor the contemplation of death*, but will find it the most profitable study, to entertain himself sometimes in *considering his latter end, and numbering his days, that so he may apply his heart unto wisdom.*

In

In discoursing on which words, I shall endeavour,

- I. To explain the full meaning and import of what the Psalmist here prays for : So teach *us to number*, &c. And,
- II. What wise and useful instructions may be learnt from it.

But here, by desiring God to teach us to *number our days*, it is not to be understood, as if we desired to know, or should endeavour to find out, the particular space of time, we have yet to live; or, which is the same, the particular time of death: This being what the Almighty hath generally thought fit to reserve, as a secret to himself. Were men permitted to know the certain period of their lives, this might be an encouragement to many to continue in their sins, who have yet a considerable time to come, and depend, at last, on the weak, imperfect repentance of a dying bed. Few would then take care for any part of life but the *last*, and so this were spent with some seriousness and devotion, would think their condition safe enough; such, you find, is the case with most young people, that imagine they have a great while longer to live; they think

that *youth* of itself is a sufficient excuse for their vanities, and that it is time enough, when their hairs *change* colour, to *change* *their* course of life, and prepare for Eternity.

But, alas! God and reason require men should live well, in order to die so; the precepts of the gospel, and the assistances of the holy Spirit, are given for our *daily* improvement in virtue; nor can there be any other way to die a happy death, but by walking in the paths of a holy life.

To this end, God hath wisely concealed from us the hour of death, to oblige us to be always upon our guard; for, since *ye know not at what hour the Son of man cometh, watch therefore, and pray always,* Mark xiii. 33.

'Tis true, in *Psalms* xxxix. 4. we read thus: *Lord, let me know my end, and the number of my days, that I may be certified how long I have to live.* But you will find this passage otherwise translated in the Bible, which gives the true sense of it; for there it runs thus: *Lord, make me to know my end,* (that is, to consider my latter end, or that I have an end) *and the measure of my days, what it is,* that is, how short it is, *that I may know,* may be sensible, *how frail I am.*

'Tis

'Tis not, therefore, to be informed of the precise number of years we have to live, that we desire, when we pray God with the Psalmist to *teach us to number our days*: But,

Under this expression we may learn the following instructions, *viz.*

1. That our days have a *limited number*, though we know not *what that is*.

2. That this number is continually growing *less and less every day of our lives*.

3. That the whole number of our days is but small, and *our years but few*; or, that *the longest life is but short, and will soon expire*.

4. That it is very *uncertain* how small this number *may be*, and *how few the days that now remain to every one of us*; or, that it is very *uncertain* how *short* our time here may be, and *how soon* death may overtake every one of us. And,

1. In *numbering our days*, we may learn, that our days on Earth have a limited number, though we know not *what that is*.

For, *Is there not an appointed time for man upon earth; are not his days as the*

days of an hireling? Job vii. 1. *It is appointed for all men once to die,* Heb. ix. 27. They must not continue here for ever, their days are finite, and their persons mortal; and, as *sure* as they are now *alive*, and converse with one another, so sure it is they must, in a little time, leave this world, and enter on a new state, into which death will translate them. A truth that every man seems *convinced* of; and yet, few live as if they were at all *concerned* in it!

But, do not the *living know that they shall die?* Do we not see our fellow creatures, our friends and acquaintance, drop daily on all sides, our cities and towns lose their *old inhabitants*, and are filling with *new ones*? And, can we forbear reflecting, that we ourselves are made of the same corruptible mould, that we are dust as well as they, and must dislodge and return to dust? the wisdom then, we should learn from hence, is to let such thoughts affect our minds; and, since we cannot live here for ever, to consider what will become of us in the end: Whether by death, we shall be dissolved into nothing, or whether there be not an immortal principle within us, that will survive our bodies, and make us happy or miserable to all eternity.

If

If death puts a period to our being, and we have no prospect beyond the grave, it will then, I confess, appear most prudent to make the best of what is before us; not to trouble our minds about futurity, but take a *full draught* of all the delights of life. But, on the other hand, if we are immortal, and must live for ever, if there be an *incorruptible* spirit in man, (as the dictates both of reason and religion tell us there is) it must then be the only wisdom to take care of *this*; *this* part of us, that is so *valuable* and excellent, must deserve our most serious attention.

Take we care then, that we act not rashly or inconsiderately in a matter of such importance, but think rather what is likely to be our state, in that unknown infinite space, that must follow this *short scene* of things. These reflections, I grant, are very natural and obvious, but are not so well weighed and digested in our minds as they should be; if they were, I am persuaded they would soon make a mighty alteration in the present conduct of our lives; they would soon make us despise the pomps and vanities of the world, they would enliven our devotion, enlarge our faith, and open to us a most comfortable view and prospect of eternity.

2. The

2. The next thing we learn from this expression, of *numbering*, &c. is, that this limited number is continually growing less and less every day of our lives. We are every day drawing nearer to our end, our time here is every moment passing away, a great number of our *days* is already gone from every one of us, and the rest are *flying*, as it were, upon the *wing*.

Few men are duly sensible how justly the days and nights succeed one another, and oftentimes carry men to their long home, before they so much as think of it. How often do men flatter themselves with many years to come, when, alas! they never reflect on the term of years that is past, and how much nearer they are every *night* to their journey's end!

We are extremely apt to deceive ourselves in taking account of our *time*, or the *number* of our days; and many who are excellent *accountants*, great *arithmeticians* in worldly matters, make gross mistakes in this. As it is fit we *subtract* what is past, for that is gone to all intents and purposes, so must we take care not to *multiply* what we have to come, which we often do, by thinking we have the *whole* still before us, when perhaps one third is gone. We should consider, what the apostle says is literally true, *we die daily*;
death

death hath already devoured some part of our life, and that which remains cannot be great, tho' we could be sure to live out the whole course of nature.

From the retrospection therefore on the number of days already gone, we should learn to *redeem* the time, and husband well that short space we have yet to come; to endeavour, as our bodies wear off, and our lives draw to an end, to purify and prepare our souls for eternity. If we have mispent any part of our life, we must *redeem* that loss, by making a better use of what *remains*; but by no means defer the great business of our souls, till old age, weakness, and dotage creeps upon us. It will then be but a very *uncomfortable* reflection to think, we have the whole work of our lives to do, (and for the doing of which only, we came into the world) at a time when we are least able to do any thing as we ought, and are just departing out of it.

The wisdom, therefore, we should learn from hence is, to call ourselves frequently to account, and examine what improvement we have made of that precious time, which is already past over our heads. What have we done in all our past life, that may be said any way to answer the true end of our creation, or promote the glory of God?

How

How have we advanced in *virtue* and knowledge? Have we made a good use of our *reason* and strength, and the several talents entrusted to our care? In a word, have we so spent our time in doing good in the world, that if God should this moment summon us before him, we could be able to give up our accounts with joy?

These are questions every wise man should frequently ask himself, and the wisdom of it consists in *this*, that the oftner we call ourselves to this account now, the easier will be our victory over sin, the more successful our progress in virtue, and the better account we shall be able to give at the last great day. For it is, in this respect, the same in our *spiritual*, as in our *civil* concerns; the man that never looks into his debts, nor takes any account of his estate, whether he be worth something or nothing, is in a fair way to become a beggar, and to be thrown into that *prison* from whence there is no redemption.

3. We may reflect further, and indeed, it is what we cannot help observing, in numbering our days, that the *whole* number of them is but *small*; that the longest life is but *short*, and will soon expire.

The time of man's life, in one place of Scripture, is said to be a *span long*; in another, man is compared to a *thing of nought*, because

because *his time passeth away like a shadow*, Psalm cxliv. 4. This is *pathetically* represented by the patriarch *Jacob*, who, tho' he had lived to a far greater age than most men now arrive at, yet thus expressed himself to king *Pharaoh*, when he enquired how old he was, Gen. xlvii. 9. *The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.*

And truly, if we consult the oldest person living, who has spun out the thread of life to the greatest length, we shall find him complaining how soon his life is pass'd away, and that the longest term of years, when pass'd, appears but a few days.

Or, if we consult our own experience, and look back on twenty or thirty years of our past life, tho' it bears a great proportion to the lease of our whole lives, yet when over, it seems but a little while, and shews us that time, not only in *picture*, but in reality, flies away upon wings. One would have thought the apostle had sufficiently exposed the shortness of human life, when he compares it to a vapour, *James* iv. 14. *φανομένον*, a mere apparition, nothing real or substantial; and yet he goes further, he calls it a vapour, *that appeareth but for a little time*, and then vanishes away. So vain and
perishing

perishing a creature is man, so *soon our life passeth away, and we are gone.*

And what now should we learn from hence, but to be *indifferent* about the things of this world, since the fashion of it, and all its pomp and grandeur so soon passeth away; to fix our thoughts and hearts on the things which are *eternal*, not to be elated by prosperity, or cast down by adversity? If God be pleased to bless you with all worldly enjoyments, be not *high-minded*, be not too *fond* of them; remember they are only *for a time*, and that there are much greater, and more durable blessings reserved in heaven for you.

If you meet with afflictions and losses, poverty and disappointments, ye have no reason, yet, to be immoderately grieved, because, as the apostle tells you, the *time is short*; nothing that troubles now, can last long; none of these things can follow you beyond the grave, but in heaven (which shall be your portion, if ye improve your sufferings as you ought) all *tears shall be wiped away from your eyes.*

But above all, how will the consideration of the shortness of our lives put a check on vice, and strike a damp on all the flattering allurements of sin! For, consider, all we aim at in the commission of any sin, is only some short temporal pleasure or advantage,

tage, which we can enjoy no longer than our life; now, as this is so *short* and uncertain, therefore no satisfaction that is truly to be desired, can depend on so treacherous and *fickle a tenure*. For when death comes, all sensual delights, all worldly advantages, are at an end.

Would a wise man then, for the sake of a few hours pleasure, run the hazard of *losing himself* and his soul for ever? Would he do a *vile, dishonest action*, even for the gaining the whole world, and *all the happiness* it can afford? Much less for those little *portions* of it, those trifles and vanities, that some are so ambitious of, which only distract their heads, turn their brain, and break their rest, which not only impair their health and shorten their days, but leave a bitter sting and lasting pain behind them? But this leads me to the

4th And *last consideration*, that we learn from the expression in the text, *viz.* That our time upon earth is not only *short* but *uncertain*; that as our days are *few* in themselves, so there is the greatest uncertainty *how few* they may prove to every one of us.

No man knows *where, when* or *how* he shall die. *I am old*, says Isaac, *I know not the day of my death*; and the youngest person alive knows as little of this, as he did.

did. *Mille modis morimur, &c.* The body of man is subject to so many diseases and casualties, that it made one say very justly, it was a miracle to see an old man.

God, indeed, knows exactly the *appointed* time, beyond which we shall not pass; but that is a secret locked up in his own breast. We know not when we are to be called away, and though we have business of the last consequence to dispatch, we have really but one moment of time to do it in; for the *present* only is what we can *call our own*. Time distils by drops, as it were, and when God gives one moment, he takes away the other, that we might learn the price of so rich a *jewel*, and *value* every hour.

Some are snatched away suddenly, in the vigour of youth, transported with hopes of many years of pleasure to come; others, in the midst of feasting and banquets, as they are eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage; others, as they are *buying* and *selling*, *building* and *planting*, with heads full of projects, and hearts so intent on the world, as if all their treasure lay here, and they were never to remove.

The wisdom, then, we should learn from hence, is, that we never trust our best and greatest interest, I mean, that of our souls, to such an uncertainty as *future time*, that is, that we never put off the grand concern
of

of our life from one day to another, or live in such a condition as we should be afraid to die in. To defer things of the last importance from one time to another, which must be done before we die, or we are for ever *undone*, and which may be better *done* now than at any other time of our life, is such an absurdity, such an extravagant folly, as wants a name bad enough to express it.

We know not how soon death may surprise us, and then all our thoughts and good intentions perish; *there is no work, or device, or wisdom in the grave*; the *only wisdom*, therefore, is to secure our peace with God, now in the time of health and strength, to preserve a lively sense of virtue on our minds, to keep always a conscience void of offence, and live every day of our lives, so as to be prepared to give a good account at the day of our death.

This would prove a *real* comfort and satisfaction, when all others *fail*; this would keep our minds easy and chearful, *sincere* and steady, in the practice of virtue; we should then *taste how sweet the Lord is*, and that his *service is perfect freedom*; we should find, by happy experience, that the *ways of religion are the only ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace*. To conclude,

Q

The

The improvement of a little time may be of gain to all eternity, and the loss of a little time may be the greatest loss in the world. So teach us therefore, O Lord, to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto *wisdom*; even to that holy and heavenly wisdom, which may teach us to consider and provide for our latter end: That we may *have oil constantly in our lamps, our loins girt, and our lights burning*; that when the *bridegroom comes, whether at even, at midnight, or in the morn, we may be ready to go in with him to the marriage.*

S E R M O N X V .

Of INTEGRITY.

P S A L M xxxvii. 37.

*Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright ;
for the end of that man is peace.*

IT has been an old objection against Providence, as if it did not sufficiently provide for the happiness and security of good men in this world ; that, whereas vice gives an immediate gratification to the appetite, the rewards of virtue are at some distance, not to be expected till a future state ; that in this world, there is *one event to the righteous and the wicked ; as is the good, so is the sinner ; all things come alike to all*, Eccl. ix. 2. Nay, sometimes there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, while the wicked prospereth in his wickedness,

Eccl. viii. 15. But what if some few instances of this nature should sometimes happen, we know the *general course of Providence* is otherwise; the natural effect of virtue is peace of mind, and health of body; nothing can so effectually promote or secure our *present felicity*, as *innocence and integrity*.

As for the prosperity of the wicked, which the Psalmist was so offended with, *that is but a mere outside, all pomp and show*; and then, it is of a very short, uncertain continuance; *the evil doers shall soon be cut down like the grass, and withered as the green herb*, ver. 2. Whereas the righteous, tho' sometimes afflicted or oppressed, are still under the favour and protection of the Almighty; their persons and affairs are in the hands of the best of friends, who will never *forfake* them. *Mark the perfect and behold the upright*, &c.

Honesty and integrity is always attended with pleasure and satisfaction at home in one's own mind, with esteem and reputation abroad; it gives courage, confidence and assurance, whereas vice and dishonesty never fails to make men *ashamed and afraid*. *He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely*; but *he that perverteth his ways, shall be known*.

Whatever present pleasure or profit the wicked man may seem to gain by his iniquity,

quity, yet he must be always *uneasy* with himself, always afraid of being *detected* and *exposed*; for this he may be *sure* of, that one time or other *his sin will find him out*: But he that *walketh uprightly, walketh surely*. By *walking* here, as in other places of Scripture, is meant, the constant course and tenor of a man's life and actions; if *that* be honest and upright, if his *intentions* be good and just, and his words and behaviour correspondent, he has nothing to fear, he walks safely and secure from danger, but if he swerve from *truth*, if he deviate or turn aside from the ways of righteousness, in thought, word, or deed, then is *he in danger* of being reproached and prosecuted by men, by his own conscience, as well as by Almighty God. *He that perverteth his ways shall be known*. So that this admirable maxim of Solomon's, is much the same, you see, with what is commonly used at this day, and universally allowed by all men, tho' seldom regarded as it deserves, *viz.* that honesty is the *best policy*, and will prove so in the end; not only by making a man's *present condition* easy to himself and others, but also as it will bring peace at the last: *That the righteousness of the upright shall direct his way, when the forwardness of the wicked shall destroy them*, Prov. xi. 3, 5, 6.

From the words of the text then, I propose,

I. To give a short description of the sincere and upright, whom we are here bid to mark, &c.

II. To shew the wisdom and excellency of such a behaviour; how it not only contributes to our present advantage, but brings peace at the last; and how justly such a one deserves to be admired and imitated by us. And,

I. By the *upright* or perfect, the sincere or honest man is understood; not a man of absolute innocency or perfection in life, *that* being scarce attainable in our present imperfect state; but *one* who sincerely desires and endeavours after it. One, whose *designs* are always good, whose words are conformable to his thoughts, and his dealings just and fair. He is called an *upright* man, as he walks by a rule that is even and strait, *the rule of truth, righteousness, and equity*; (agreeably to which, the philosopher describes his *happy man*, by a four-square solid body, that is *smooth* on each side; stable and consistent with himself.) For the present nature of man, being by some means or other distorted, altogether unconformable to that
good-

goodness, which should direct it to its true and principal end; this is the *reason* why so many are impatient of being confined within the *close* and narrow *passage* of honesty; for crooked and reeling movers require more liberty of way, and a broader course; as we see in natural bodies, what is crooked, will not be held in so narrow bounds, as what is strait; therefore the *ways of the wicked* are said to be *crooked*, Prov. ii. 15. But the upright is one that walks on steadily in the strait and *regular path* of virtue, keeps within the bounds of nature and reason, is *just*, and gives what is due, both to God, to man, and himself.

1. To God, he endeavours to pay that reasonable service and worship, which is *due* from a rational creature to his Creator. He looks upon himself as continually under the view of an omniscient being, *whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*. He treats every thing relating to God, with due respect and reverence; he walks *humbly* with his God, under a just sense of his own weakness and fallibility; does not think it decent to expostulate with his Maker, or direct him in the government of things; but submits to his wisdom, whose *righteousness is like the strong mountains*,

tains immoveable; and his judgments like the great deep, unfathomable.

2. With respect to man, he is fair and candid, righteous and equitable; he abhors all deceit and cunning, and knows not how to dissemble or equivocate; he acts openly, as in the view of all the world, and never does that to others, he would not willingly submit to himself. He is *true* to his engagements, keeps his word and promise, though to his own disadvantage; he hurts none by word or deed, but does all the good that lies in his power; for, so the word *righteous* often denotes in Scripture a *charitable, beneficent* person; *the righteous is ever merciful and lendeth*. He employs every talent to the honour of God, and the benefit of mankind; and though he be always zealously affected in a good thing, he endeavours, in the midst of his zeal, to keep a conscience void of offence, both towards God and man.

3. With regard to himself, the upright man is the same in private as in public, the same in the most secret retirements as in the most solemn places of concourse; he will no more be guilty of a base action in the *closet* than the *temple*; for he knows, every place is open to God, *who is about his path,*
about

about his bed, and spieth out all his ways. He esteems it the most noble and honourable victory, to subdue his own corrupt inclinations, and that the greatest empire in the world is to be lord of himself: He keeps his reason in *the throne*, where it ought to be, and makes every appetite and passion obedient to its directions.

And, when reason has its *due command*, and is supported by the assistance of God's holy Spirit, then the man of integrity *ordereth his conversation aright*, and shines as *a light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*.

Thus, you have in brief, the character or description of this amiable person, the sincere and upright man; a very imperfect one, I confess; and yet, sufficient to discover, in some degree, what is proposed in the

II^d Place, *viz.* The excellency and wisdom of such a behaviour; and how justly a person of this character deserves to be admired and imitated by us.

For, what can be more excellent and lovely, than to see a man observe *justice, equity, and uprightness* in all his dealings? How agreeable are these things to human understanding, and the dictates of sound reason! Virtue is no less delightful to the mind, than light to the eye, or harmony
to

to the ear: It exalts and refines the human nature, and brings it as near as possible to its original innocence: It reconciles and unites us to God, and makes us resemble our Father which is in heaven.

It gives present peace and comfort in this life, and the most infallible security we can have of eternal peace and happiness hereafter.

This, we are sure, will recommend us to the divine favour; whereas, without this, nothing else can; no other virtues, no other performances whatever, will avail us without *sincerity*.

But, because men do not seem to be so easily convinced of this, by general arguments, I shall descend to *some particulars*, which, I hope, will sufficiently prove, that to *walk uprightly* is the best and wisest course a man can take, to be happy here, or hereafter. For,

1. It is the safest course.

2. It is the most pleasant and delightful.
And,

3. It gives us the best title to honour and esteem from men, and the highest assurance we can have of an infinite reward from God in heaven. And,

1. It

1. It is the safest course: It was the observation of the wisest of men, *He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely*, Prov. x. 9. Such a man is secure, not only from the lash of human laws, from all those many *infamous disasters* and misfortunes, which, we see, follow close upon the heels of fraud and injustice, but he is safe also from the fears of *losing* or *wandering* out of the *right* way, and from the fears of meeting with any insuperable difficulty therein; having the wisest counsellor to advise, the best of guides to conduct him, and a God all-sufficient to deliver him out of trouble: For God *preserveth the state of the righteous, he is a shield to them that walk uprightly*, Prov. ii. 7. Matter of unspeakable consolation, to one that is obliged to sojourn among the tents of wicked men! And yet, thus it is with the man of integrity: *He is not surprized*, he has no reason, at least, to be surprized, at *any sudden calamity*, nor *afraid of any evil tidings*, because *his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord*: Yea, though *he walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he feareth no evil*, being conscious to himself, that he wilfully *does none*: he is under none of those dreadful apprehensions that make the hypocrite *tremble*, of having his mask pulled off, of being *exposed* and despised;

despised; for he *means* no ill, and therefore *fears* none. The *wicked*, indeed, *often fly*, when none *pursueth*; they are always *jealous*, *suspicious*, and *afraid* of those they have wronged; but *the righteous is bold as a lion*. Dishonesty leads men into many *intricate labyrinths* and *perplexities*, it is a *dark*, a dangerous way, has so many turnings that men cannot *see* or *know* where they are, and makes them *diffident*, *uneasy*, and full of doubts and disquietudes; but the honest man is never at a loss, he sees his way *clearly* before him, and so can take heed to his goings; for the way of virtue is *direct* and *uniform*, *visible* to men of the lowest capacities, and open at one view; no man can possibly mistake or lose his way, without the greatest heedlessness and non-attention. *The path of the just is of itself a shining light*, his own *integrity* shall guide and direct his going in the way, *Prov. iv. 18. xi. 3.* This will satisfy him, that he is taking the *direct* course to heaven: Whatever *disputes* may be raised about it by *litigious* men, he builds, like the wise man, on *firm ground*, upon a foundation inmoveable, which neither the winds, the rain, nor the floods, can ever overturn: He is *not to be shaken to and fro by every blast of vain doctrine*, by the many *tedious* and *trifling* controversies about religion; for after all that can be said, there

there is but one *thing necessary* for a Christian, and that is very *plain* and easy to be understood: To *love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity*. Under these peculiar *advantages*, he may *boldly* launch forth, and pass with safety over the *waves* of this troublesome world; wherein, though he often meet with thunder, storm and tempest, yet, he has a *sure hope* for an anchor, integrity as ballast to keep him steady, and a kind providence to conduct him safe at last, to the place where he would be, to the haven of eternal rest and peace.

In the mean time, the upright man, as I observed,

2. Enjoys as much pleasure and delight as this world can afford, and that without the danger of suffering pain and remorse in the end. For who is there that lives more to his own content and satisfaction, or is less disturbed with the vicissitudes and vexations of the world? Who can, with so *much* reason, expect to find the most friends, or the fewest enemies, as he who always does what is just and fair, things acceptable to God and approved of men? Who takes the most direct way to *live long*, and *see good days*, but he that *keeps his tongue from evil*, and his lips that they speak no guile? Such a one has no need of weapons or armour,

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as the heathen poet observes; his own innocence is an impenetrable shield of defence, against all the calumnies or injuries that can be thrown upon him; and tho' all things *without* be full of tumult and confusion, he enjoys *within* a perpetual calm, a sovereign cure for all outward evils, the satisfaction of a good conscience; a pleasure, to which the most exquisite delights of sense, is but froth and vanity! Those soon wear away; the joy of wicked men is for a moment, and the end of their mirth is sadness; but this gives a man a continual feast, makes him *eat his bread* with comfort, and truly enjoy the *fruit of his labour*, because *God answereth him in the joy of his heart*. And then,

3. In an upright life a man finds *honour* and *reputation*, as well as safety and pleasure, and has the highest *assurance* of an infinite reward from God in heaven. An honest man is generally *esteemed* even by the greatest of hypocrites, and the worst of men; one cannot help thinking and speaking of him with respect, and be ready to lend him a helping hand in distress. For integrity is the only thing that merits true praise and commendation, as it renders a man a *public blessing* to society. A man of great abilities, great learning, wealth or
power,

power, without *honesty*, to influence his behaviour, is the most noxious kind of brute, and enabled only to do the more mischief in the world: But he that sincerely intends the benefit of mankind, that scorns to do a base action, and is ready to sacrifice himself for the service of the public, this is the man that deserves *true honour*; this cannot fail of recommending him to the favour of the great, to the friendship of the good, and to the esteem of all; this must raise him up a name, and force his very enemies to praise him in the gates. For as the holy Psalmist says, *men will praise thee, when thou dost well to thyself*, Psalm xlix. 18.

Here then we behold the wisdom of integrity from the *present* advantages that attend it; but then, *mark the perfect, and behold the upright*, and you will find the *end of that man is peace*, his life is not only happy, but his death comfortable, there is *peace in his end*, and *his hope full of immortality*; and when *the memory of the wicked shall rot*, when the most magnificent works and designs of the ungodly shall be buried in disgrace and oblivion, *the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance*.

And indeed, the upright man must wait till another day for his full recompence of reward. Whatever satisfaction or applause he may enjoy here, is properly the natural
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consequence of virtue, the glorious reward of which is only to be obtained in another more glorious state, wherein God the righteous judge, who cannot but do right, shall render to every man according to his works.

In the mean time, this world is a state of trial, wherein the faithful servants of God must work out their salvation, till the day is spent, and the time of retribution approaches; then we know assuredly, that *it shall be well with them that fear the Lord, however it has fared with them here*, Eccl. viii.

12. Then shall oppressed virtue hold up her head, truth shall then prevail, and the righteous stand up in great boldness; and when the false, the cunning, the treacherous part of mankind shall be ashamed to shew their face, and shall be doomed to eternal confusion, these shall enter into glory, attended with the applauses and acclamations of saints and angels.

And this shall be the time, when that of the prophet shall be manifested to all the world, *The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of it quietness and assurance for ever*, Isaiah xxxii. 17.

All that now remains, is only a word of exhortation to such as hear me, that they would (as the Psalmist here bids them) mark the perfect, and behold the upright, that
they

they would soberly reflect on the beauty and advantages of an *upright* and *honest* conversation, so behold and observe the present happy and final rewards of the man of integrity, as to follow his steps, and imitate his example.

Let us consider, to walk uprightly is no less our *true interest*, than our indispensable duty. In the ways of vice and dishonesty there is no safety, no peace, or self-satisfaction; here a man is always in *danger*, always in *fear*; whereas an upright life procures us a general applause among men, and entitles us to the favour of God; it is attended with safety and satisfaction, administers present comfort and tranquility of mind, and secures to us eternal glory and felicity in the world to come.

Righteousness and integrity is more acceptable to God, more pleasing in his sight, than all other sacrifices or institutions whatever; and in comparison of which, they are accounted as nothing, tho' never so various, never so costly. Offer to God the sacrifice of righteousness. Thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of oil, &c. what are they in competition with true righteousness? This is the only thing that is truly good and acceptable to God, *to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.*

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Let me conclude then in that most admirable and comprehensive exhortation of the apostle: Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things, and the God of peace shall be with you.

And may the God of peace sanctify us all, that our whole spirit, bodies and souls may be preserved blameless to the coming of our Lord Jesus, &c.

S E R M O N XVI.

Of P R I D E.

P R O V. xvi. 5.

*Every one that is proud in heart, is an
abomination to the Lord.*

AS there is scarcely any vice more easily discovered in *others*, so there is none more difficult to be found out in *ourselves*, than this of *pride*: A vice that entered into man with original sin, and seems to lie as deep in his constitution. It was this, excited our first parents to rebel against their maker, and the same vanity has ever since infected all their posterity. We *naturally* desire to be *thought* greater, and more considerable, than we were created; and, what is worst of all, we love to be flattered and *buoyed* up in this *high conceit* of ourselves.

R 2

Now,

Now, when a vice is thus interwoven with human frailty, grows up with the body, and becomes the *darling* of the mind, it must be a strong and speedy corruption, must require great care and wisdom to suppress it, and the consequence is dreadful, if not speedily subdued: For *pride goeth before destruction, &c. Every one that is proud in heart, is an abomination to the Lord.*

In the following discourse then, I shall endeavour,

I. To enquire into the true nature of pride, and wherein it consists.

II. To shew the wickedness and folly of it, together with some of the ill consequences attending it.

III. *Lastly*, To give some short directions for the preventing or suppressing it. And,

I. It will be necessary to enquire into the true nature of this vice: Since, it is observed, there are some qualities that look much like pride, and yet are not so. For,

i. To be conscious of one's own abilities, whether intellectual or moral, and upon good reasons to declare and make them known to others, this is oftentimes necessary, not to be

be avoided: He, that is learned, virtuous or honest, must know it himself, and that herein he excels many others of a contrary character; and then, he may and must discover them to the world, on all just occasions. Knowledge is to be communicated for the instruction of the ignorant, and we are to *provoke* others to *love* and good works, by *letting our light shine before men*, to the *glorifying of our heavenly Father*.

And, as a man may be *sensible* of, and exert his own accomplishments; so,

2. He may be *allowed* to take a pleasure and satisfaction in these great favours of providence, since all the good gifts of God are, in their own nature, beneficial to men; and, it is natural to be pleased and delighted with what is useful, and improves the happiness of our being: For this puts us upon being *thankful to God* for the blessings we possess, and makes us chearfully employ them to his honour, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift.

But then, this pleasure or satisfaction, must not exceed the *value* of the things themselves, or transport us into a *disdain* or *contempt* of others that *want* them; which obliges me to proceed to a positive description of this vice, and point out some of the indisputable marks and tokens of it.

Pride, then, in few words, is a too high opinion of those excellencies or advantages we possess above others, whether learning, or virtue, beauty and strength, nobility, wealth or honour: It is always founded on the *real* or *supposed* enjoyment of such things as these, and consists, the apostle has truly defined it, in *thinking more highly* of ourselves, on the account of these things, than *we ought to think*.

And, to know when we thus over-rate, or entertain too high conceit of ourselves, take notice of the following characters.

1. When you see a man *confide* absolutely in his own *understanding*, and will hearken to no other counsel but *that* of his own mind, (though we know, such a one, as *Solomon* tells us, has oftentimes but a *fool to his counsellor*;) when he pertinaciously adheres to and pursues his own humour, in spite of all *reason* and *argument* whatever: Such a one is not only *wise in his own conceit*, but would fain be esteemed so in others; he *assumes more* than belongs to him, and with an *imperious* haughtiness, endeavours to impose his own *notions* on other men. He is *confident* and *positive* in his *assertions*, he despises all that differ from him, and has *assurance* enough to oppose his own single judgment, to the most prudent determination

tion of his superiors : He thinks nothing too hard for his understanding, or too intricate for his reason ; he loves to be busy in *mysteries* of state, in *secrets* of government, and the most *abstruse* points of divinity, and will determine as *dogmatically* in *these*, as in the *meanest* affairs of common life ; and after all, is no more capable of being convinced of a mistake, than of being persuaded to confess his insufficiency.

2. When we see a man behave like the *Pharisee* in the gospel, commending himself, and scoffing at *others*, thanking God that he is not as other men, but more honest and virtuous than his neighbours, always *ready* to expose and aggravate the least infirmity in his brother, desiring to *pull the mote* out of his eye, but overlooking the beam that is in his *own* ; when, I say, we see a man carrying himself with such insolence towards God, and such contempt of men, we may justly conclude, he is puffed up with pride, which sours and destroys all the good qualities he may *seem* to be possessed of.

3. As to the advantages of body, beauty, strength, there are not wanting persons of strong fancies, and weak judgments, that seem to be even *proud* of these, who spend

a great deal of their time and pains in the admiring and improving these inferior endowments, placing their chief delight in *costly apparel*, and *external ornaments*; forgetting, in the mean time, and neglecting to adorn themselves with the inward, invisible beauty of the mind, made up, as the apostle assures us, of much better materials, such as a *meek and quiet spirit*; a beauty, which, though *despised* because not seen by superficial men, yet is in *the sight of God of great price*.

4. That man is proud of his nobility, wealth and honour, who takes his judgment of these things, not from the dictates of reason, but the insinuations of flatterers and dependants, as if they had added an infinite value to his person, and given him a privilege of abusing and trampling upon his inferiors: Such a one is continually talking to himself as *Nebuchadnezzar* did, *Dan. iv. 30. Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?*

These presumptuous speculations transport his thoughts, and make him run besides his reason and himself; he grows too great for reproof, too wise for instruction, and too ambitious to own an equal. In a word, he
aspires

aspires beyond the limits of his nature, looks upon himself as adorned with the perfections of Deity, and on all the little people below, as his creatures and vassals, and expects to be worshipped and adored as an idol.

Having thus described the nature and character of pride, with respect to the several subjects it feeds upon, I come now to consider,

II. The sinfulness and folly of it, and the evil consequences that attend it.

As it is directly contrary to that great duty of humility, the ground and foundation of all virtue; so, whomsoever this evil spirit hath once possessed, it expels all generous principles out of the mind, and makes way for many others as wicked as itself: It is an absolute defection or revolt from God, transports a man into a defiance of his Creator, and makes him affect an impious greatness, (like the giants of old) which may reach as high as heaven. An attempt as *vain*, as it is *wicked*: For, as God resisteth the proud, so the end of it is *destruction*, and a fall.

It is the design of pride, to draw the applause and admiration of the world; whereas nothing sooner makes men both hated and contemned. For,

I. What

1. What is *wealth* and *nobility*, and all *the glories* of the world, but temporary and uncertain at best, such as many little casualties and accidents may deprive us of? Besides, they are not properly our own, nor give any *real worth* to the persons of men. If we boast of an extraction, that is an *honour* purchased by our parents, not of our own acquisition; and if our ancestors were famous for their wisdom, courage or industry, and thereby made themselves noble and esteemed in the world; yet, as for us, by priding ourselves in their virtues, we plainly confess, we have but few of our own, and that we are basely and shamefully degenerated. As for wealth, that we receive from the favour of providence, for it is God's blessing on man's industry, *that maketh rich*; and, we are but as stewards to manage it to his service, who hath entrusted it to our care: If we have acquired our riches *lawfully*, as they are chiefly owing to God's blessing, so are we obliged to return to him both use and principal; and, why should we be proud, that we are more in debt than another? If *unlawfully* and dishonestly, we have more reason to be *ashamed* of them than *glory* in them.

2. To

2. To be proud of our wisdom or learning, is an equal folly: Learning, I confess, is a valuable blessing, but it is then best, when it teaches humility. All pride, indeed, proceeds from a *want* of true *knowledge*, and is an argument of the greatest folly: (And therefore, the *Greeks* say, the proud man lives in an error, in a lye, ἀλάζων, ἐν ἀλῇ ζῶν. For, a man of learning cannot but know the folly and deformity of *pride*; he must be better acquainted with the *frame* and passions of human nature than others, and cannot but see, how *odious* and disagreeable it makes us to the world: He must know likewise, that nothing, properly speaking, can merit *true honour*, but *virtue* and a *right* use of the *liberty* of the will. Farther, learning gives a man a more distinct view of the imperfections of human understanding, how ignorant and blind we are even in the smallest matters, that even a *fly*, or insect, is sufficient to perplex and confound the wisest of men.

Now, it is natural to suppose, that the *more* we know our own *weakness*, the clearer discovery we have made of our own *ignorance*, which, indeed, is the chief use of learning, the more humble we should be in our thoughts and behaviour: It is certain, we have the greater reason to be so; for
should

should that man be puffed up above others, who can best explain and demonstrate his own meanness and poverty? And if pride agree so ill with wit and learning, and some of the most worthy ornaments of the mind, how despicably *vain* will it appear, when placed on the lower advantages of body?

The most accomplished beauty, the greatest strength of body, is soon impaired and destroyed by age or sickness. How many creatures below us stand on equal foot with man? How many *excel* him in *strength* and agility of body? And then, what is *might*, but cruelty and usurpation, if divided from right? What are the great conquerors of the world, but great disturbers and destroyers of mankind, if they have not *justice*, as well as power, on their side? But then,

3. Tho' these common gifts of nature, as being of a lower value, are not sufficient matter of glorying, yet may not one be allowed to set a price on those *noble* and *substantial* ornaments, his *virtues* and *good* works? These, I freely own, are *real excellencies*, to be esteemed above all others; and yet to be proud of these, is of all others the greatest folly. For besides, that they are the immediate gifts of God, the genuine, *sole* operations of *his holy spirit*; to be proud of
of

of them, is the surest way to *lose* them; for this will obscure the brightness, will taint the beauty of all our virtues, and deprive us of the *honour* and *reward* that belongs to them.

Such then is the *folly* of pride, whatever subject it be founded upon; but there is one reflection yet behind, which may serve to display at once the prodigious absurdity of this vice, and the just fate that generally attends it.

It is easy to be observed, that a *proud* man, not only makes himself despicable to others, but is *miserable* in himself, and that it is impossible he should ever be otherwise.

A remarkable instance, and what may serve instead of many, we have in the story of *Haman*, *Ester* iii. 11, &c. a great statesman, and favourite to one of the greatest princes in the world. *The silver, being ten thousand talents, (says the king Abasuerus) is given to thee; the people also, as seemeth good unto thee.* He had the lives and fortunes of many thousands of people at his disposal; and could one imagine now, that the omission of a ceremony, of a *bow* only, from a mere captive and slave, should so much interrupt the happiness of this great man, as we find it did?

When Haman saw Mordecai at the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him,
be

he was full of indignation against him. Nevertheless Haman refrained himself, and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and told them of the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, above all the princes and servants of the kingdom. Yet all this, says he, availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the king's gate, chap. v. 9, 10. How unhappy now was Haman, even in the midst of all his honours! How weak was his power, how vain his glory, which was not able to support him against the affront of so mean a person! He had every thing that ambition itself could wish for, yet all was just nothing to him, whilst he saw Mordecai sitting at the king's gate.

What man in his senses now would not rather chuse to be in the state of a poor *Mordecai*, sitting at the gate, than that of the mighty *Haman*, swelling in the palace? The one enjoys the peace of a good conscience, and fears nothing but God; whilst the other is continually *tortured* by his own *restless* passions, is discontented with every thing, and even *afraid* of his own shadow.

The proud man is always suspicious and apprehensive of danger; and great reason is there, since both God and man is his enemy, and all hands are at work to *destroy* him:
No

No opportunities will be lost, and *many* must he give, by the *jollies* and *mistakes* into which his passion hurries him.

Haman, we see, looked upon *Mordecai* as an enemy, and so resolved to remove him to a gallows of fifty cubits high: But *here* was a handle to his own ruin; the king, upon a just examination of the matter, ordered *Haman* himself to be hanged on the gallows, he had prepared for *Mordecai*. Thus *Haman's* pride was both a torment and a punishment to him, and he was, by a just judgment, caught in the *same snare* he had laid for another. Such is the effect of pride, in regard to a man's own private *interest* and felicity; but the mischief it produces in the world, is not to be expressed: It is the root of *all vice* and enormity; it is the *bane* of youth, and brings old age into contempt. It breeds envy, hatred, and contention; spoils friendship and conversation; destroys the peace of families and societies, and embroils the world in wars, tumult and confusion. *Pride* therefore, you see, *was not made for man*, let him be ever so highly dignified or distinguished: *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*; let not *the mighty glory in his might*; let not *the rich man glory in his riches*. None of these are a sufficient foundation for *glorying*, it is pernicious and fatal to put any confidence in them;

them; *but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth me, that I am the Lord.* Here, indeed, is matter of rejoicing, and great consolation: In the *true knowledge and service* of God, is the prime excellency and glory of man: In a right *understanding* of God, and a sincere obedience to his will, a man may find self-applause, quiet, satisfaction and security. But yet, give me leave here to interpose, that though this be a man's true excellency, a high perfection, transcending all others; yet, even *this*, is no matter of pride and self-sufficiency: Since our highest attainments in religion are at best *imperfect*; we are less beholden to ourselves for it, for every good and perfect gift comes from above; and we have more reason to magnify the grace and goodness of God, than glory in ourselves: Indeed, if we rightly understand and know God, the more *humble* and modest shall we be in ourselves, and make it our daily endeavour, with all reverence and submission, to imitate that God we adore; whose *daily work it is to shew loving-kindness, justice, and righteousness in the earth: For in these things I delight, saith the Lord.* Give me your patience therefore, whilst I proceed, in the

III^d and last place, to offer some short rules for the preventing or suppressing of *Pride.* And,

I. Since

1. Since it is a vice so nearly allied to and lurks so deep in human nature, particular care should be taken to guard against it, at first, in the tender minds of children. It is the first bad quality that shews itself in young persons, and should never be cherished or encouraged, since it grows too fast of itself: Parents should be careful therefore, not to prefer, or shew favour to one child more than another, (without good reason) for this will certainly blow up the one with pride, and fill the others with envy and malice against the favourite; as we find it happened among the children of *Jacob*, who carried their resentments so far against his darling son *Joseph*, as had like to have brought the grey hairs of their father with sorrow to the grave.

2. We must be watchful over our own hearts, which are naturally as vain as *deceitful*, that we cherish not the beginnings of pride, or suffer our thoughts to dwell on the opinion of our own worth. It is as natural for men to *flatter* as to *love* themselves: What great care then should we take, to guard against the assaults of pride, *we* that are children of sin and born in corruption, since it was able to prevail not only

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against *Adam*, but even the very angels, in a state of *purity* and *perfection*?

When any high conceits then arise within us, let them be immediately suppressed, by the recollection of some of our past failings and indiscretions: Would we often call to mind the many follies we have been guilty of, even the best and wisest of us, in the course of our lives, we should find little reason to boast of those few advantages we enjoy above others; but the best of us might say with *Peter*, *I am a sinful man, O Lord.*

3. We should never compare ourselves with such as we think more foolish or wicked than ourselves, for then we shall be apt to commend ourselves too much; but rather *compare* with such as are really eminent for wisdom or piety, and this will give us cause enough to blush, and say with the humble publican, *God, be merciful to me a sinner.*

4. We should use no arts or devices, nor do any action, to purchase the praise of men; and, when it is deservedly given, not be overjoyed; *be not high-minded, but fear*: Our rejoicing in the gifts of God should be allayed with fear, lest this good bring us to evil, lest having the praise of men, we miss of our reward in heaven. In all our designs

signs and actions, we should endeavour chiefly to approve ourselves to God, who seeth the heart, who resisteth the proud, and gives grace to the humble.

5. *Lastly*, We should be frequent in our addresses to Almighty God, that he would pour into our hearts that most excellent grace of humility; that we may think of ourselves, and every thing about us, with lowliness and sobriety, (as in justice we ought to think;) that we may be always sensible of our *subjection* to and *dependence* on God's power and goodness; that we *may understand and know* that he is our Lord, our judge, our father and preserver, in whom we live, move and have our being; *who exerciseth loving-kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth; for, in these things I delight, saith the Lord.* And, by such a temper and behaviour as this, do we imitate the blessed Saviour of the world, who was meek and lowly in heart, and has promised to advance such to eternal glory in his heavenly kingdom.

S E R M O N XVII.

*The way of INSTRUCTION by P A-
R A B L E S justified.*

M A T T. xiii. 10.

*And the disciples came and said unto him,
why speakest thou to them in parables?*

TH E way of speaking by Parables is of great antiquity, and not only used by the *Jewish* doctors, but by all the wise men of the East: Yet, because this way of teaching had in it something of obscurity, and the doctrine contained under the disguise of parables, was not so easy to be apprehended by the lower sort of people, the disciples here take upon them, to ask our Saviour the reason of his delivering

delivering himself in this manner, *Why speakest thou to them in parables.*

This has likewise been made a matter of cavil and exception, by a noted writer of the present age; and the answer given by Christ to this question of the disciples, in one of the following verses, being misrepresented and set in a wrong light, is exposed to a very extravagant censure and ridicule: It is thought inconsistent with *his* character, who came to instruct mankind, to speak in a mystical, obscure manner; and the reason he gives, still more strange, *ver. 13. viz.* Therefore speak I to them in parables, because they, seeing, see not, and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand; and, in them is fulfilled the prophecy of *Esaïas*, which saith, by hearing, ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest, at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

My design, therefore, in the present discourse, shall be, to give an answer to the question here proposed; and, to explain and

justify our Lord's proceeding in this matter. In order to which, let it be observed,

1. That though this method of teaching be something *dark* and obscure, yet, was it not unintelligible to the *attentive* and *well disposed* hearer; as will appear from those solemn words, with which our Saviour so often concludes his parables, *He that bath ears to hear, let him hear*; and therefore, when he was pleased to instruct the multitude by parables, he says to them, *Hear and understand*, Matt. xv. 10. And when his disciples asked the meaning of that parable, he reproves them, saying, *Are ye also without understanding?* Intimating, that it was not so much the *obscurity* of his speech, as their own *dulness* and *want of understanding*, that made them not perceive the import of his doctrine.

2. This method of instruction was not without its uses and advantages; since, hereby it was visible, who were the sincere lovers of true *wisdom* and knowledge, and *duly qualified* for the reception of the gospel-light. It is a very commendable thing in learners, to desire to *know* the full sense and meaning of their master's instructions; and, as our Lord's disciples asked him the meaning of those parables they understood not,
so

so might the other hearers of Christ have done the same, had they not been indisposed to receive the doctrines he taught, and chose rather to be kept in error by the Scribes and Pharisees, than receive instruction by the mouth of Christ. And then, again, it is observed, that such short and comprehensive lessons, as they are best remembered, so, when we have once attained to their true sense, they stick closer to us, for the time spent in explaining them, makes the idea the more fixed and lasting in the memory.

“ As for parables and fables, we see, by the
“ conduct and success of our Saviour, how
“ proper and effectual they are to the intro-
“ ducing a change of manners or opinions
“ amongst men: Since, it was by them
“ especially, that he exploded the inveterate
“ corruptions wherewith the Pharisees had,
“ for a long time together, perverted true
“ religion, and thereby deceived and mis-
“ guided the people. And Solomon, tho’ he
“ might have done as much as any man in
“ the way of oratory, whether by writing
“ or personal delivery, as being the wisest
“ of men, and of the most universal, natu-
“ ral abilities; yet, when returning to him-
“ self, he was desirous to make his ill-gotten
“ experience most generally profitable to all
“ men, he left not his speculations digested
“ in a methodical treatise, but into com-

“ pendious sentences and parables, easy to
“ every capacity, and portable to every
“ tongue: Nor did he look only to the
“ matter, but the manner of his delivery;
“ and, as he searched out and prepared
“ many parables, so also he sought to find
“ out *pleasant* words; to subdue men, as it
“ were, by their own *affections*, to such *obe-*
“ *dience*, as, without some interest gained
“ by something that *pleased* them, and then
“ a *conviction* admitted upon that interest,
“ they would never have yielded them-
“ selves unto.

“ Certainly, familiar tales, proverbs and
“ parables, composed with judgment and
“ life, have in themselves, more efficacy
“ than *naked precept*; and find acceptance,
“ when a bare precept is rejected. For tho’
“ reason cannot but prevail, when it is
“ *heard*; yet, *sensuality* at every hand, so
“ *powerfully* pre-occupates the way, that
“ reason comes not always to have due
“ audience. For men naturally abhor the
“ *bridle* and the precept, that is offered to
“ no other end than to *restrain*; but, when
“ the force of the precept, infused in the
“ *disguise* of some other thing, goes the
“ way of our affections, it is then fully
“ received, and we easily yield to the rule,
“ whose truth we have once, with full
“ consent, acknowledged. And, as fables
“ and parables are engaging and persuasive
“ with

“ with every individual hearer, so, being the
“ most speedy means, to disperse and publish
“ any thing among the *multitude*, they be-
“ come the most effectual means to a *general*
“ reformation.” *John Spelm. life of Alfred.*

3. When our Saviour, therefore, was pleased to speak in *Parables*, this did not proceed from his *unwillingness* to let the people into the right sense and meaning of his doctrine; but from their *indisposition* to receive it, when delivered in a more *plain* way. For so St. *Mark* observes, *chap. iv.*
33. *He spake the word to them in many parables, as they were able to bear it.* Some of the *parables* uttered by our Saviour, were *obvious* in themselves; as that of *Dives* and *Lazarus*, of the rich man pulling down his barns; and, their chusing the uppermost rooms at feasts: But then, there were others, which, had they been delivered with greater plainness, would have enraged and exasperated the *Jews*, and stirred them up to a more violent opposition to his doctrine: Such as that which proclaimed him the Messiah, the Son of God; which they called blasphemy; and that which styles *him* the good Shepherd, and *them* wolves and robbers: Such as censured their *traditions*, and told them, it was not uncleanness of the *hands*, but the pollution of the *heart*, which rendered them detestable in the sight of God;

a *doctrine* highly displeasing to the Pharisees: Such as exposed their stubbornness and disobedience, as the parable of the vineyard planted by the husbandman; and, that of the two sons, of which the eldest promised fair, but did not what he promised: Such as taxed their pride and self-conceit, in that of the haughty Pharisee and the Publican: Such as foretold the wonderful increase and propagation of the gospel among the Heathens, as that of the leaven and grain of mustard seed: Such as represented the ruin and *unchurching* of the *Jewish* nation, as that of the cutting down the *barren fig-tree*, and that solemn decree pronounced of those who refused, upon invitation, to come to the wedding supper, that they should *never taste* thereof. Now, all these things were so offensive to the *Jews*, and especially the *Pharisees and rulers*, that, if they had been delivered plainly to them, it might have provoked them to that *rage* and persecution against his person, as would have quite discouraged his young disciples, and hindered the performance of those works, which were preparatory to his resurrection, and the glorious appearance of his kingdom.

4. We may observe, that what our Saviour thus delivered in parables, did not contain

tain the *fundamental* doctrines and precepts of the gospel, (these being all delivered with the greatest plainness and perspicuity, in the audience of all the people, as you read in the 5th, 6th, and following chapters of St. *Matthew*) but related chiefly to the progress of the gospel, and the entertainment and success it should meet with in the world; which were matters *unknown* and unthought of, and therefore called *mysteries*, that is, events that never entered into the mind of man, and vastly surpassing their expectations and *conceptions*. Now, the predictions of things of this nature, were usually taught in figurative and *allegorical* expressions, as not being so necessary to be known or understood, as the *fundamental* rules of faith and manners. Things *essential* to happiness and salvation, were always delivered in the *plainest* and most intelligible manner; but, *prophecies* and predictions of *future events*, and particularly those relating to the success of Christianity, were called the *mysteries of the kingdom of God*: These were *secret* things, such as could not be foreknown and conceived by mankind, and were generally delivered under the disguise of *emblems* and parables. But,

5. And *Lastly*, The reason here assigned, by our Lord himself, why he spoke sometimes

times so obscurely in parables, we may observe, was the *wickedness* and *perverse-ness* of the people, which disqualified them from receiving any benefit, by his more plain discourses; *therefore*, says he, *Speak I to them in parables, because they seeing, see not, and hearing, they do not hear nor understand.* For, this is nothing more than a common *proverbial* expression used in Scripture, and other authors, concerning such men as are so wicked and slothful, that they either attend not to, or will not follow the clearest intimations and convictions of their duty. Thus, to a *revolting and rebellious people*, which had cast off the fear of God, the prophet *Jeremiah* addresses himself in this manner, chap. v. 21. *Hear now this, O foolish people, which have eyes and see not, which have ears and hear not.* And God speaks to *Ezekiel* thus, chap. xii. 2. *Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not; for they are a rebellious house.*

When we speak of virtue to men addicted to vice, or preach *morality* to those who are immersed in *sensual* and destructive pleasures, what is a more common form of speech, than to say of such men, that seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not? For, this is really the true state and condition of those

those who will not make use of their eyes and ears, whose minds are more intent on other things, and who are absolutely incapable, through their own *vice* and prejudice, of seeing or hearing the things that belong to their everlasting peace.

Hence, then, may we clearly perceive the meaning of those words of Christ, when he says, further, on this occasion, *To them it is not given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God*, that is, to them I do not allow, or vouchsafe, a clearer knowledge of these things, because they are too much *disposed* to slight and neglect them, and *indisposed* to receive any benefit from them; but, *To you it is given to know*, &c. that is, to you I think fit to allow, and vouchsafe, the knowledge of these things, as I find you inclined to attend to, and willing to *improve* them; for, so is the phrase generally understood in Scripture, (*vid. Rom. xi. 8. with Whitby's Comment.*) as, where mention is made of the *days of life, which God has given*, or vouchsafed us, Eccles. v. 18. of the *sovereign travel God has given*, that is, allotted, to the sons of men. *Give not thy holy one to see corruption: Give not*, that is, permit not, *my feet to slide: Give not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin*, Eccles. v. 6. *Give not sleep to thine eyes*, Psalm cxxxii. 4.

So that, when it is said, that to some it was given to know the mysteries of the gospel,

gospel, that is, the divine power and wonderful success of it in the world, but to others 'twas not *given*; it is meant only, that God was pleased to permit the *obstinately* blind and wicked to continue in their ignorance, and to vouchsafe the clearer revelation of these things, to such as were well disposed to receive profit by them, and make use of their knowledge, to their spiritual improvement and instruction.

For, as our Lord goes on, *ver. 12. Whosoever bath, to him shall be given; and, whosoever bath not, from him shall be taken away, even that which he bath. Whosoever bath*, that is, duly improves the knowledge that is vouchsafed him, *to him shall be given* more, and he shall have more abundance; but, *whosoever bath not*, who has abused or neglected it, and by making no use of it, is as though he had it not, *from him shall be taken away, even that which he bath*, that which he only *seemeth* to have; because, he had it *unprofitably*, and to no use and purpose. So that, from hence, it will be no difficult matter to understand the reason of our Lord's speaking in parables, *viz.* because they, to whom he spoke, were like to those *inconsiderate* and slothful men, of whom it is proverbially said, (because of their neglect to act according to their knowledge) that seeing, they see not, and hearing, they hear not,

not, neither do they understand; and (so, by their thus *shutting* their eyes against the light, and stopping their ears against instruction) in *them* is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which *saieth*, by bearing ye shall bear, and not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and shall not, or will not, perceive: It being the same with the *Jews* of that age, as it was with their forefathers in the time of that Prophet. For *this people's heart*, says Christ, *is waxed gross*, has been made hard and callous, by their own evil habits and prejudices, so that the word cannot pierce into it; their ears are dull of bearing, and their eyes have they closed against the light; lest, at any time, they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them, or their sins should be forgiven them, Mark iv. 12. For all these blessings they might receive from the influence of my doctrine; they might receive the blessings of *repentance* and *recovery*, and remission of sins, was it not for their wilful obstinacy and obduration.

I shall now beg leave to conclude this discourse, with this short inference from the whole.

From what has been offered then, in vindication of our blessed Saviour's thus delivering himself in parables, it appears evidently, that

that there can be no just reason to accuse him of acting *inconsistently* with his mission, or contrary to the infinite goodness and compassion of that great being from whom he came. For, if men will be obstinate and wilful, will not see when they have eyes, nor hear when they have ears, will not make use of the means of light and knowledge, it is their own fault: It is not God's intention they should continue wicked and miserable, it is not that he *would* have it so: But, so it comes to pass, this is the natural consequence and effect of their not dealing ingenuously with the truth, and shutting their eyes against their own interest; they are the worse for their knowledge, and the more *inexcusable*, by enjoying the greater privileges of instruction.

That hardness of heart and blindness of understanding, which follows upon our obstinate resistance of the dictates of divine grace, is no immediate infliction of heaven; it is the necessary effect of our own perverseness, it follows upon the condition of the matter, as rust does the nature of iron. God has made men free agents, and set before them life and good, death and evil; it lies in their breast to chuse which they like best: He has established a *light* in the soul of man, sufficient to shew them the difference of things; but if they will not be

be directed by this *light*, or *violently* put it out, they must expect to wander in darkness, and become the authors of their own misery. Let us then take care to act always according to our knowledge, and as we Christians do now enjoy the greatest means of grace, and the best opportunities of instruction, so, let us use our *eyes* and our *reason*, let us exert the powers and abilities God has given us, and prove ourselves *rational* and *wise*, by pursuing the things that belong to our everlasting peace.

S E R M O N XVIII.

The DEATH *of the* RIGHTEOUS.

P A R T I.

N U M B. xxiii. 10.

——— *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.*

IF any thing can make men serious, it must be the consideration of their latter end; and those that live ever so much like fools, will begin to be *wise*, when they come to die; though some have used themselves all their life-time to live without thought, yet, the approach of death will force them upon thinking, and considering at least what is like to become of them in another world.

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Let them be ever so profane in their lives, yet, at the prospect of death, they cannot forbear shewing a desire of being religious; and, with *Balaam* here, will *wish* and *pray* with the greatest earnestness, that they *may die the death of the righteous, and their last end may be like his*. How willing are they to die the death of the righteous, and fare as he shall do in another world, though they could never endure the thoughts of living like him here!

But alas! such wishes, it is to be feared, are vain, and will end in confusion and disappointment; they that will not follow the righteous man in his life, cannot in reason expect to enjoy the comforts and privileges of his death.

And, I doubt not but every one will find it true at last, that nothing in this world can fortify us against the dreadful assaults of death, but the conscience of a virtuous and well-spent life.

In the prosecution of which subject, I propose,

- I. To enquire into some of those peculiar comforts and advantages, which make it so desirable to die the death of the righteous. And,

II. How we ought to live, if we expect or desire so to die.

I. Among the many peculiar comforts and advantages a righteous man enjoys at his death, I shall only mention these three :

1. Peace of conscience.
2. A steady faith in the merits of Christ.
3. The noble prospect of eternal glory.

1. He has peace of conscience, or tranquillity of mind.

When a man has lived according to the rules of reason and religion, done all the good in his generation, and been guilty of no offence, but what he has endeavoured to repent of, how calm and composed is his mind under such circumstances ! How serene and peaceable are his thoughts about futurity ! He is not disturbed with any gloomy apprehensions of future evil, his innocence assures him he deserves none, and whatever state be allotted him in another world, he is sure he shall never *suffer* evil for having led a *good* life here.

Being thus armed with innocence, as an impenetrable shield, and supported by a good
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conscience, he can look misery or death in the face, with an invincible courage and sedateness.

But, as for the ungodly, it is not so with them: *There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*

When life has been ill-spent, and guilt lies like a load upon the mind, when a man's conscience is become his enemy, death is then a frightful consideration. To look back on a wicked life, must be very disagreeable; but how dark and dismal is the prospect before him! With what *horror* and *trembling* must such a one launch out into eternity!

Whereas a good man, who has devoted his life to the service of his maker, is entertained with smooth and comfortable reflections; there is *hope in his death*, and he expires in peace and pleasure.

2. Another great comfort he enjoys, which makes his death so desirable, is a strong and steady faith in the merits of a Saviour.

The best of men find themselves unqualified to stand the test of rigorous, impartial justice. They know they are *sinners* in many respects, and so encompassed with frailty and infirmity, that they are afraid of the pure eyes of God, which cannot behold iniquity; and therefore, their only hope is

in the mercy of God, thro' the merits of Jesus Christ. The most exalted piety, the most unspotted virtue, that man can attain unto in this life, cannot insure heaven, without the intercession of that mighty advocate, who is gone before *to prepare a place for us*. *No man cometh to the Father, says he, but by me; and there is no other name under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.*

And, by virtue of this name, a faithful Christian may triumph over death and all its terrors; since Christ, by his death, has destroyed death, and plucked out the sting of it.

He has expiated the guilt, and subdued the power of sin; he has led Satan captive, and confounded all his accusations against us; he has satisfied the divine justice, and is *able to save those to the uttermost, that come unto God by him.*

This is that faith which giveth us the victory over the world and death, and makes the righteous man embrace it with joy and confidence, and only as a swift passage to eternal happiness.

As for those indeed, that are destitute of this faith, who have forfeited the privileges of a Saviour by their scandalous and wicked lives, and lie overwhelmed with guilt and sin; death puts on a face of terror to them:

them: For what hopes have they, what remedy to support them under it? Can they expect any share in the merits of Christ, whose precepts they have so long renounced and trampled upon, without remorse? Will the Son of God intercede for those, who, by their obstinate rebellion and contempt of his laws, have crucified him afresh, and exposed his religion to shame and blasphemy?

No! the Scripture gives us little reason to think so; it plainly tells us, we shall *receive according to the things done in the body, whether good or bad; that tribulation and anguish will fall on every soul of man that doth evil; but to them only that by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life.* Which brings us to the

3^d And last great comfort a righteous man enjoys; and that is, the joyful hope and expectation of future glory purchased for him by the merits of Christ, and promised to his sincere, though imperfect, obedience.

For, we know, says St. Paul, that after this earthly tabernacle be dissolved, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; and that when we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord. So that for a good man to die is gain, death is the happy instrument of improving his

condition, and makes a change infinitely for the better; for it sets him out of the reach of misery, removes him from this vale of sorrow to the mansions of peace and felicity; and though the happiness of pious souls departed may not be consummated till the resurrection, yet, in the mean time, if to be in *Paradise*, to be in *Abraham's Bosom*, to be with Christ, be a *happy state*; this is expressly promised, and this must certainly imply much greater happiness than any that is to be known on this side the grave.

As for wicked men, when they are forced hence, they are driven out of their paradise, they are bereaved of their *all* when they put off their bodies, they lose all hopes of future happiness, and must needs be under the utmost distraction and astonishment at their leaving a world, which they have placed all their thoughts and affections upon.

But a good man, whose heart and treasure is in heaven, desires to be there himself, as soon as it pleases God to call him. He knows that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven*, and that he quits his body only for a time, which shall be raised in glory, and fitted for the enjoyment of complete felicity.

These, now, are some of the peculiar comforts and advantages which a righteous man enjoys at his death; and who
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is there that may not, upon these considerations, be *willing* to submit to a change, that will only convey him to a state of unchangeable bliss? Who would not joyfully submit to die, when it is only in order to live in everlasting happiness? Or what is there in all the dreadful pomp of death, that may not be looked upon with pleasure, when we reflect, it is only to translate us to an *exceeding eternal weight of glory*?

This is what makes the death of the righteous happy and desirable, and therefore I proceed,

II. To consider, very briefly at this time, (designing to enlarge upon it hereafter) how we are to live, if we expect or desire so to die. This is not to be obtained by a *wish* only at the last, by a few dying prayers and tears on a sick bed; but by the constant and daily endeavour to live a righteous and *holy life*. They that would secure peace of conscience, the love and favour of God, to support them in their *last hour*, must enter betimes upon a religious life, and keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man. For as the fruits of virtue are peace, joy and confidence in the Holy Ghost, so the effects of sin will always be misery, confusion and disappointment, and we may
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as well expect to *gather grapes of thorns*, to use our Lord's comparison, as hope for peace and comfort from an ill-spent life. Men may flatter and deceive themselves, that, let them live ever so loosely, things may still end well at last; but they never consider how hard it is to change the nature of things; it is more than the strongest and most stubborn imagination can do; and the nature of things must be changed, and the methods of God's dealing with mankind entirely altered, his promises and threatenings all cancelled, light must be changed into darkness, and the grossest contradictions reconciled, before we shall be able to enjoy any real pleasure or satisfaction from the pernicious paths of wickedness and vice; no! the only safe and secure way to die well and depart comfortably at last, is by living well, and a steady perseverance in the practice of virtue. *Keep innocence*, &c. here you have firm and sure footing, a rock immoveable to build your hopes upon; and oh! that we were all so *wise* as to *consider our latter end*, and apply ourselves to these things in time, these things that concern our everlasting peace, before they are for ever hid from our eyes; that so we may not be driven to such a wretched shift as to depend only upon a wish at the last, but may be supported by the assurances of a good

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good conscience, and the powerful assistance of God's holy Spirit, and be prepared to give up our souls into his hands, as into the hands of a *faithful Creator*, of a merciful Saviour and Redeemer.

SERMON

S E R M O N XIX.

The DEATH *of the* RIGHTEOUS.

P A R T II.

N U M B. xxiii. 10.

— *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.*

IN a former discourse, the subject of enquiry was, how, and on what accounts a righteous man's death becomes so desirable, *viz.* because he enjoys some very great comforts and advantages, which are able to support his mind in that dreadful time; he has peace of conscience, a strong and steady faith in Christ his Saviour, and a firm and joyful hope of immortal happiness.

These

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These three things make him more than conqueror over that king of terrors; and death appears to him no other than a speedy entrance on eternal life.

As it is *appointed* for all men *once to die*, we must, one time or other, feel and try what death is, and whither it will carry us; it cannot but be every man's wish and desire to strengthen and fortify himself against that hour, that he may quit the world with the most ease and quiet, and advantage to himself.

Be we ever so averse to the thoughts of death in the time of youth, health and strength, yet, when it comes, (and how soon that may be is uncertain) we shall be forced to think of it, whether we will or no; and, the less we think on it now, the more dreadful will the *approach* of it be to us. We shall begin then to wish and pray, (tho' we never did before) that we *may die the death of the righteous, and that our latter end may be like his.*

But alas! This is not a thing to be effected at that time, this is a work to be begun and prosecuted in our health and strength; a comfortable and happy death, is the peculiar effect and consequence of a virtuous and well-spent life.

I shall therefore now (as I proposed) enlarge upon this II^d point to be considered, *viz.* How we may attain to the happiness of dying a righteous man's death, which, (as I observed) is not to be done by a *wish* only at the last, by the faint and languishing prayers of a sick bed, but by a constant and vigorous endeavour to live a holy and righteous life.

Only here, I would entreat you to observe, that by a happy death, I do not mean, an exemption from severe and painful diseases; nor yet from sudden and violent accidents; for such things happen to the good as well as bad: *Lazarus*, though he had a mansion provided for him in *Abraham's* bosom, carried to the grave a *body* full of sores and ulcers; while the rich man, whose intemperance and uncharitableness had kindled for him a fire unquenchable in hell, only grows sick and dies. Thus the primitive martyrs, who were supposed after death to be admitted into the beatific vision, ended their days in flames, and upon racks, and such instruments of execution, while their cruel persecutors and murderers died in their beds. So that we are not to conclude, that these outward accidents or circumstances do either contribute to, or detract any thing from the *happiness* of a righteous man's death; for
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that consists chiefly in the temper and disposition of the mind, in the peace and tranquillity of soul, arising from the conscience of a good life, a steadfast faith in the merits of Christ, and the glorious hopes of a blessed immortality.

And as no outrage, no violence, no ill accidents whatever can deprive a good man of these comforts at the hour of death, so they are such as nothing in this world can give but an upright and religious life. They that would *die the death of the righteous*, must make it their early and earnest endeavour to live the *life* that he does, and *keep their conscience void of offence towards God and man*. They must begin betimes to *remember and obey their creator*, by mortifying their appetites and passions, by a constant regular devotion, by a strict observance of the rules and ordinances of religion, and embracing all opportunities throughout the whole course of their lives of promoting the honour of God, and the benefit and happiness of mankind.

And all these things, I say, they must apply themselves to, *betimes*; they must begin with the first dawning of reason, and early in the morning of life. For that is the best and most proper time to *serve God acceptably*, and make sure of his favour and benediction.

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An early piety is the most pleasing in the sight of God. This will invite the holy Spirit to take up his residence in our hearts, which will support us in all dangers, and carry us safe through all temptations. Thus must we begin a religious life betimes, if we would be sure to die a safe and happy death.

For they that defer this *great concern* to the last periods of life (as too many are apt to do) and depend on the piety of old age, or the penitence and prayers of a dying bed, (whatever may be the issue at last) can never expect to find that real comfort in their death, which can proceed only from the regular course of a virtuous life.

It is true, men had better repent late than never, and it is the duty of God's ministers to press and exhort sinners to repent even on their dying beds, as being the only remedy left to save their souls from ruin; but alas! supposing their piety and repentance then to be sincere, it is hard for them to know it, and it is impossible they should find that solid peace and satisfaction of mind, which a righteous man does; because it is impossible for them to be sure that it is sincere, or such as God will accept, to their pardon and salvation. So that even those persons, who do truly and sincerely repent, some little time before they die, must needs depart
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notwithstanding in a very sad and melancholy state; for tho' their pardon be sealed, and their sins forgiven, yet they themselves being in no degree assured of this, and having no time to prove the sincerity of their own hearts, they must die with many doubts and scruples upon their minds, and in great anxiety and fear what their fate will be to all eternity.

I dare not say, it is impossible for a dying sinner to repent and be saved, (for *with God nothing is impossible*;) but this I do affirm, that, considering the extreme difficulty of repentance after a life of sin, the uncertainty of having time or grace given for that great work, the power of evil habits, and the pains and distractions of a sick bed, it is more than probable, that whoever puts it off to that time, will never sincerely repent at all; and for one that becomes a true penitent at the hour of death, or is then accepted into favour, many hundreds are found hypocrites and undone for ever.

For, you must consider from what motives and principles such a late repentance generally proceeds. Is it not from force and necessity, from the fear of death or punishment, from the absence of temptation, or the like? And is this a principle strong enough to beget a true and thorough reformation in the heart? No! we who attend on dying

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sinners, know too well, alas! from our own observation, that the vows and protestations of such miserable men are extremely deceitful: For among those who do recover from distempers which have been thought mortal, (the most certain way of judging in this case) of those, I say, that beyond their hopes are restored to their former health, we find but few that really perform their promises, and live up to those solemn professions they made in their sickness; an undeniable evidence, that if they had then died as they expected, their repentance would have been found defective and imperfect, they would have been judged hypocrites, and their hopes must have perished with themselves.

The only way to obtain peace and tranquillity at the last hour of life, is always to *keep well* with our own conscience: For hereby we can make a very probable guess, at what is like to be our state in another world. *If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things; but, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God,* 1 John iii. 20, 21. That is, if our *heart* or conscience *condemn us*, then will God likewise condemn us; for he knows more of us than our own consciences know, he knows us better than we *know ourselves*; and if we
know

know so much wickedness of ourselves that we cannot but condemn ourselves (though every man is a favourable judge of himself) God, who knows a great deal more, must condemn us also: But, *if our conscience condemn us not*, if this acquit and absolve us, *then have we confidence towards God*, great and sure hopes in God's mercy, that he will not condemn us. We cannot, indeed, have the confidence of innocent men, because we have been sinners; but we may have the humble hopes of returning and repenting prodigals, the filial assurance of dutiful and obedient children.

If we have served God with zeal and activity, if we have so *abounded in the work of the Lord*, in all the *fruits of righteousness, goodness and charity*, that our own consciences approve and commend us, this will give us a secure hope in God's mercy, such a hope as will not *make us ashamed*, as will not deceive us. For how can a man's conscience deceive him in this? Every one must know, whether he carefully avoid all known and wilful sin, whether he discharge all the essential parts of his duty to God and man, whether he behave himself as becomes the gospel of Christ, and live *soberly, righteously, and godly* in this world. A man, whose conscience gives him this testimony, may safely trust and rejoice in God; for whatever

other defects the pure eyes of God may see in him, they are all within the grace and mercy of the gospel, and therefore cannot cut him off from his pardon or reward. Thus when conscience absolutely condemns, or when it commends, acquits and absolves, its sentence is a divine oracle, and assures us what our judgment and condition shall be in a future state; and as this is a great source of comfort and joy to a good man, so it must equally terrify and deject the habitual, unreformed sinner. What little hopes has such a one of heaven and happiness, where his conscience tells him he has all along despised the offers of grace, and ventured with his eyes open on those sins, to which he knew damnation was denounced.

The conscience, if awake, is a true and impartial monitor, and will never be persuaded or bribed to justify the *wicked*; there is no way to obtain its applause without a tried and experienced virtue, till the *flesh* be subdued to the *spirit*, till our *minds* are refined and purified, and our *conversations* adorned with divine graces.

But this is not to be done in a moment, amidst the hurry and confusion of a sudden illness, or at the last hour of life. The great work of reforming and purifying our souls, so as to make them fit company for saints and angels, is what requires the whole
force

force and vigour of our minds; and how unfit are men to do the greatest business of their lives, when they are full of pains and infirmities, and life itself is so great a burden, that they are hardly able to stand under it? How incapable to break off ill habits, and change the whole bent of their thoughts and the course of their lives, when their faculties are spent and worn out, their memories fail, and their hearts are hard and deceitful above all things? So that all that a sinner can do in the evening of life, will be done in great disorder and perplexity, and with doubtful success; and consequently, cannot give that satisfaction and peace of mind, which is the necessary, genuine effect only of a virtuous life.

Those men therefore, I fear, will find themselves wretchedly mistaken, who hope to *die the death of the righteous* after a wicked life. Let them wish and pray ever so heartily, it is impossible to recall the time past, or live their lives over again; it is impossible to live a righteous life, when they are just a dying; and without this, they will find but little grounds of consolation from any thing else. It is true, the best thing they can do, is to pray and repent, and endeavour to make their peace with God; this is the only remedy left to redeem their souls from ruin; and therefore, before mat-

ters come to this extremity, let all such as have time and health, resolve immediately on a good life, that so they may escape the horror and despair, which will otherwise be apt to overwhelm them, at the hour of death.

The extreme difficulty of obtaining our pardon by a late repentance, should engage us to prevent it by an immediate reformation; the danger of having our prayers then rejected after a long course of sin, should hasten us with all speed into a life of virtue; and the great hazard of being for ever undone by the least delay, should awaken us into a serious endeavour, from this very moment, to *make our calling and election sure*, before it is too late.

I doubt not but every man, be he ever so thoughtless in life, will desire to *die the death of the righteous*; but *wishes* will never do, much less a *wish* in the last period of life. Every man that knows any thing of the gospel, or the terms of salvation, must be abundantly convinced of the contrary; and they that will not hear or regard now, will be convinced of it too, to their own sorrow and confusion, when they come to try and depend upon it. To conclude,

As nothing can be so great a torment and disquiet to the mind of a dying person as guilt and vice, so there is no comfort like that

that of a clear conscience, a reflection of an innocent and useful life. And indeed the difference between good and bad men, is never so remarkable as when they come to die. *Mark the perfect, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.* With what triumph and exultation does the apostle St. Paul, upon a review of his life, discourse of his death and dissolution? *2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, &c. I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, &c.*

What would not any of us do, to be thus affected when we come to leave the world, and to be able to bear the thoughts of death and eternity, with so composed and well-satisfied a mind? Why, let us but endeavour to live holy lives, and be obedient to God, and useful to men in our several stations, as this apostle was, and we shall have the same ground of joy and triumph he had. For this is the proper effect of virtue and goodness: *The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of it quietness and assurance for ever.* All the good actions we do in life, are so many seeds of comfort sown in our consciences, which will spring up one time or other, but especially in the ap-
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proaches of death, when we come to take a serious review of our lives ; for then men's consciences use to deal plainly and sincerely with them, and tell them the truth ; and *if* at that time *our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.*

S E R M O N XX.

PREPARATION *for* DEATH.

2 K I N G S. XX. I.

—*Thus saith the Lord, set thy house in order: For thou shalt die and not live.*

TH E S E words contain a solemn message of death to King *Hezekiah*, with a short direction to him, how to prepare himself for it; and, as our Lord once told his disciples, *What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch*; so may every one living apply these words to himself, and should be continually prepared to receive his last summons, since it is appointed for all men *once to die*. The best preparation for death, and the only way to make it safe and comfortable, is by the regular

gular course of a good life; but, as this contains in it the exercise of many particular virtues and duties, I shall beg leave to lay before you some of the most necessary and useful to this purpose. And,

1st. The first and most principal to be advised, as a duty absolutely necessary in this case, is an immediate repentance, a sincere reformation of every thing we know to be amiss in our thoughts and behaviour. Without the frequent and daily exercise of repentance, it is impossible to live a good life. The best of us sin every day, and must confess and repent every day; which yet, may be done with more exactness and solemnity every time we prostrate ourselves before God, in the public devotions of the church, or receive the holy Sacrament, and on all public days of fasting and humiliation.

No man can be said to live in the fear of God, or be secure of his favour, without such a regular *exercise of repentance*; and, sure, no man can die peaceably, that suffers any one sin to remain unrepented of; and therefore since we know not in what hour or minute death may surprize us, we cannot defer our repentance even for an hour or minute, without the utmost danger to our souls,

For,

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For, one sin may be sufficient to ruin us, and if we do not immediately cast it away from us, it may for ever cast us out of the favour of God: If we sleep in sin, or let but *one day's sun go down upon our wrath*, the wrath of God may overtake us before we rise in the morning.

Could we, indeed, keep off death as long as we pleased, could we bid *the sun stand still*, or command time and opportunity to wait for us, and stop at our pleasure, it might not be so very necessary to be so much in haste; but this is not in our power, life and time is not at our disposal; we may, if we please, by God's grace, repent to-day, but we may not live, perhaps, till to-morrow. The *present moment* is our own, it is like an estate in *possession* (and a very valuable one too, if we knew how to prize it) and no wise man would part with such an *estate in hand*, for a precarious *uncertain reversion*: No prudent man, when he had an opportunity put into his hands, of making himself happy for ever, would go to put it off to another day; which is venturing his all upon the greatest uncertainty in the world. And yet, *thus we* do, thus we befool ourselves every hour we delay our repentance. Our souls now lie at stake, and they are our best and greatest stake, which it is in our power at present to secure; but we are under no concern

cern about them, we defer the care of them from one day to another, till at last it becomes a thousand to one but they are lost for ever.

A speedy repentance, therefore, as it is the first and main article in a religious life, so it is the most necessary preparation for a safe and happy death.

But then, as we are thus to *set our souls in order*, by rectifying what is amiss, and reconciling ourselves to God; so,

2dly, The next thing is to *set our house in order*, by a prudent disposal of our worldly goods, to the benefit and satisfaction of posterity. As no man would be willing to leave the world without adjusting accounts with God, so are we under an equal obligation to settle accounts with one another, and not only to pay our debts, to forgive injuries and offences against us, but also to make the wisest distribution we can of what we leave behind us.

For this is what both *justice* and charity requires from us; it may be the only means of preserving peace and love among relations, of preventing vexatious law-suits, quarrels and animosities among brethren, which the apostle tells us, are a disgrace to the Christian religion, 1 Cor. vi. 1.

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As every good man prays for the peace of his own family, and, after the example of Christ, desires to leave peace behind him, so should he be careful to take the proper methods of securing this blessed legacy to his relations, by making his will in the plainest and most distinct manner; and for the doing of this, the best opportunity is the season of health and strength, when the mind and memory is sound and perfect; for to manage rightly in this point, requires great judgment and mature deliberation, and it cannot be so well done when we are sick in body, disordered in mind, and our thoughts discomposed by the pains and agonies of a death-bed. To reward the benevolence of friends, the honesty and faithfulness of servants, the love and duty of children, to settle a just and distinct provision for relations, to distribute our alms, if we are able, among such as are *most in want*; this requires, and indeed deserves much time and thought, and should we leave it to the last moments, we may be imposed upon either by our own weakness, or the selfish officious insinuations of those about us; we may perform this great affair in a very imperfect, unequal manner, and instead of peace, may convey strife, mischief and confusion to our families for many generations.

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Besides, a good man, when he is dying, would desire to employ his thoughts in the fitting and adorning his soul for heaven, and will not care to give much attention to this world, when he is just going to leave it, and when he has business to mind of so much greater importance.

For all which reasons, our excellent church has very piously and prudently enjoined, *that men should be often put in remembrance, to take order for the settling their temporal estates while they are in health*, that is, when they are best capable to perform it in the most wise and Christian manner.

3dly, Having thus made our peace with God, and settled accounts with man, by doing justice, and declaring our charity to all mankind, and especially by providing for those of our own household; the next thing to be observed in order to a safe and happy death, is frequently to contemplate upon it, to wean our affections from this world, and carry our thoughts and meditations into futurity.

As the consideration of death and eternity is of itself sufficient to give us the greatest contempt for this life, so by making the thoughts of death familiar, we shall soon make it *easy*, and even *desirable* too, as being the only gate through which
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PREPARATION *for* D E A T H. 303

we pass into eternity. It is impossible for that man to *live* well, who does not often think of *dying*; and it will be difficult to meet death without surprize and confusion, if we do not endeavour to take off its *natural horror*, by placing it often before our eyes.

Death is justly stiled the *king of terrors*, it is what we have never tried, and are naturally afraid of; but by conversing with it, and reflecting often upon it, we may learn to despise it, and find it not so dreadful a thing as it appears to our first apprehensions.

It is the advice of some divines, that whoever would die well, should live every day as if it were his last; but this is not to be understood in that strict and rigorous sense, as if men were obliged to turn hermits, to quit the business and employments of life, to spend all their time in prayers, meditations, and a retirement from the world. The true meaning of this rule is to teach us, that we should be careful so to live, as to be every day prepared to die, to carry an habitual sense of death and judgment about with us, so as to be afraid of committing any known sin, to discharge our duties every day to God, our neighbour and ourselves, never to do any thing we should be afraid to do, if we were that day
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to die; and when we have committed a fault, to repent of it with the same *speed* and *sincerity*, as if we were to die before night, as if we were immediately going to appear before the tribunal of Christ.

This it is to live every day, as if it were our *last*, and this does not exclude the prosecution of our respective callings; for, if our occupation be honest and lawful, and consistent with morality, while we are following that, we are serving God; while men are labouring at their trade, for the maintenance of themselves and families, they are obeying the express command of God, who requires us to avoid idleness, to be *industrious* in the calling we were bred up to, to provide for our own household, and to mind the business to which the providence of God has called us.

And, the time spent in the pursuit of the several employments of our vocation, is as truly and properly spent in the service of God, as if it were spent upon our knees in the closet. Nay, I will venture to affirm, a life thus spent in a faithful discharge of the duties of our station, is much better spent than *theirs*, who *pray always* and *never practise*; who are *always repenting* and bewailing their sins, and yet still sinning and relapsing; who are over strict in the outward *show* and profession of religion, but dis-

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cover none of the *power* of it in their lives and actions; who seem to be *full of faith*; but never shew it by *their works*; whereas, *faith without works is dead*, devotion in the church without a suitable behaviour in the world is abominable, and he that draws near to God *with his lips*, when his *heart* is *false* to him, who pretends to *walk with God*, when he really *walks after his own lusts*, will be exposed as a hypocrite at the great day of trial, and have his portion with infidels and unbelievers.

We should therefore be sincere and upright in our hearts; uniform and consistent in all our conduct, and endeavour every day of our lives to think, speak, and act, in all our dealings and conversations, with the same candour, truth, justice and integrity, as if we were to be summoned before night to answer at that great tribunal, where *all things are known*, and *no secrets can be hid*. We should be careful never to do any thing, that we should be ashamed of, if our Lord were to come and surprize us the very next moment, but employ ourselves continually in all such good works, as our own consciences tell us, God will approve of, and reward us for, when he comes and finds us *so doing*.

This it is to live a truly good life, and behave every day as if it were our last; and

he that endeavours so to live, can never be unprepared for death; and, if such servants are taken away suddenly, in the pursuit of their callings, out of the *shop*, or the *field*, they need not be afraid or surprized: *Blessed are those servants, whom their Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.*

4. The last particular I would mention, by way of preparation for a happy death, is, to take great care in the improvement of our time. This being so very short and uncertain, and yet, that on which depends our eternity, there ought to be no vacant spaces, no parts of it lie waste and unimproved; what the necessary business of the world does not call for, should be filled up with some innocent, pious or charitable employment. It is true, recreations and diversions are allowed us, to unbend the mind and prepare it for the proper work of life; but not to *pass away the time*, as too many absurdly express themselves: We have too little of this precious treasure allotted us to throw it away on trifles; and, it must be the height of folly, to spend the greatest part of our time in diversions from the main business of life. People of all ranks and stations have something else to do, besides *sitting down to eat and drink, and rising up*
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PREPARATION *for* DEATH. 307

to play; if they would consider, and shew themselves rational creatures, they would find work enough for this short and narrow span of life, and be persuaded to improve every part of it to the best advantage.

Six days shalt thou labour, says God; and as he is pleased to require but *one*, to be devoted to our refreshment and his own solemn worship, so should we take care to spend this day especially, not in profane diversions, but in such religious exercises as may serve the purposes of eternity. He has kindly commanded us *to rest* on this day from bodily labour, that we might provide for our better part; that by prayer and holy contemplation, we might improve the soul, and qualify ourselves to keep an eternal sabbath with God in heaven; and most certainly, he that does not carefully improve this day, and indeed as much of his time on all others, as his worldly affairs will admit of, in promoting the welfare of his soul, the great important affair of his salvation, will find himself but indifferently qualified to give up his accounts at that great day, when time shall be no more.

To conclude: Let us then, among all other directions, take care to make such a good use of our time now, as may

turn to the best advantage hereafter; that
so our present time of trial and proba-
tion, which is but for a moment, may pro-
cure us an exceeding *weight* and eternal
crown of glory.

S E R M O N XXI.

S P I R I T S *in* P R I S O N.

I P E T E R iii. 18, 19, 20.

— *Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit: By which also he went and preached to the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the Ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water.*

I N the verses foregoing, the apostle is exhorting Christians to bear with patience, whatever sufferings they should be exposed to for the sake of their religion: *Having a good conscience, that when*

they speak against you as evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ; for it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing. There is no matter of sorrow or shame in suffering innocently, for *Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust.* As if he had said, it was our Saviour's own case, and he *suffered* patiently tho' he *suffered* wrongfully; he who had no guile in his mouth, nor fault in his life, *suffered* in the severest manner, for us sinners, that *he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh.* It therefore highly becomes all his followers to undergo with chearfulness, all kinds of sufferings for him, who condescended so far as to suffer and to die for them.

But then, tho' he *suffered* for our sins, and was put to death in the flesh, that is, in his human nature; yet he was raised again by the power of his Godhead, he was *quickened* and made alive by the *spirit*, and consequently can raise and rescue us from our present sufferings, and finally destroy all obdurate offenders. A notable instance of which power, he shewed once in the days of the old world, to whom he *went* by the same spirit, and *preached to the spirits in prison*; for he it was that preached by the mouth of *Noah*, to those wicked spirits that
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were hardened in sin and disobedience, while God, in his long-suffering, *endured their provocations*, and waited for their repentance, *no less than an hundred and twenty years*, while the ark was building, and *Noah* preaching to them. Yet so exceedingly obstinate were they to the very last, that *only eight souls were saved in the ark*; the like figure whereunto, even baptism doth now save us, by the resurrection of *Jesus Christ*; (not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.)

In my present discourse upon the words, I propose,

I. To explain this difficult passage of scripture; and then,

II. To make some proper observations and reflections upon it.

I. The principal difficulty in this passage seems to be, what we are to understand by *the spirits in prison*; and here most agree, that by *the spirits in prison*, is understood the *idolatrous wicked world*, and particularly that *ungodly race of men* before the flood, who are very properly said to be in *prison*, that is, in *bondage*, in *captivity* to sin and Satan, held in chains by their own lusts, and in the bonds of their own iniquity.

This is a common way of speaking in sacred Writ, and the very phrase, which the evangelical prophet has used no less than three times, when he foretold the glorious success of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, *chap. xlii. 7. I gave thee for a covenant to the people, for a light to the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners out of prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.* And again, *chap. xlix. 9. I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayst be my salvation to the ends of the earth; that thou mayst say to the prisoners, go forth.* And again, *chap. lxi. 1, 2. The spirit of the Lord is upon me,—he hath sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening the prison to those that are bound.*

Thus, accordingly, those that are in bondage to their lusts, are represented as persons shut up in prison; and they that have overcome their appetites, and are able to despise the pleasures of sin, are such as have *come out of prison, and put off their chains.*

Now those that lived before the flood, may properly be said to have been *in prison* on a double account:

1. Not only by reason of their bondage to sin; for we read, *All flesh had so corrupted his way, and the wickedness of man was*

was *so* great, that every imagination of his heart was only to do evil continually, Gen. vi. 5, 6. But,

2. They were in *prison* likewise, under a real condemnation, as having actually received the sentence of destruction, if they repented not in the space of an hundred and twenty years.

My spirit, says God, shall not always strive with man; and the reason was, for that he also is flesh; that is, by following the pleasures of flesh, and by sensual living, he is become like a brute beast, incapable of hearing or being guided by reason, as if he had no reasonable soul in him. I will therefore no longer strive, by reason or argument, to reduce him; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years: Though he deserve a swift and speedy destruction, so long will I expect his reformation, before I bring the flood upon him.

Some interpreters understand the words *my Spirit* in this place, to denote the soul or *spirit of man*, which was breathed into him at his creation by Almighty God, and may therefore be truly called likewise the *Spirit of God*; and if so, this will further help us to discover the propriety of that expression, whereby the spirits of the wicked are said to be in *prison*.

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My Spirit shall not always strive, that is, that *particle* of the divine Spirit which I have *breathed* into man, which made him a *living soul*, a rational creature, which by their predominant lusts is imprisoned or detained *unprofitably*, deprived of its due liberty, and restrained in the use of its rational faculties, shall no longer continue in them: I will take it from them: I will not suffer them to live any longer to abuse it, I will destroy them from the face of the earth.

Thus the long-suffering of God waited for them in the days of *Noah*, expecting their repentance, and keeping them, as it were, in prison for the day of slaughter, if they repented not in the time limited.

During which interval, and before, God sent unto them his prophets, denouncing by his Spirit the judgments that were falling on that incorrigible generation. For, to *them* it was, that *Enoch* the seventh from *Adam* prophesied, saying, *The Lord cometh with ten thousands of his angels, to execute judgment upon all, and to reprove the ungodly for all their ungodly works, and for all their hard speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.*

To *them* also he sent *Noah*, a preacher of righteousness, a man whose life was exemplary and agreeable to his doctrine; who,
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by *preparing an Ark* before their eyes, for his own preservation, in obedience to the divine command, *condemned the old world*, Heb. xi. 7. not as a *judge*, but a *witness* against them; he condemned them by his doctrine, and by his example, and left them altogether without excuse.

Thus did the Spirit of Christ preach to them by the mouth of *Noah*; and therefore, the *antediluvian* age is, by the *Jews*, stiled *the age of the Holy Ghost*; when the Spirit of God, inspiring those holy men, was for so long a time reproving and striving to reclaim them, though in vain, for they were now ripe for judgment, and God resolved to punish them.

Now, this punishment being the destruction of that race of men by a deluge, their *souls* or *spirits* have been ever since kept in prison, or reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day.

And because from that time to our Saviour's coming, God sent no prophet to the whole heathen world, I mean, no person with a commission to preach to all nations, and *declare the gospel to every creature*, but *suffered them to walk in their own ways*, Acts xiv. 16. therefore are they said to have been *disobedient only once, of old time, in the days of Noah*.

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By which word, *disobedient*, is here understood, a course of *great and notorious sin*, committed with the highest degree of *impudence*, and in downright contempt of the divine power and authority.

What their particular sin was, is uncertain; it is by some supposed to have been that of *unnatural uncleanness*, which they practised contrary to the light of reason and nature, and the dictates of their own *mind and conscience*. All that is mentioned in sacred history, before God pronounced his resolution of destroying them, is, the unequal *matches of the sons of God with the daughters of men*.

The *sons of God* were certainly the worshippers of the true God, the *generation of Seth*, the *professors* of true religion; and those with whom they married were *idolaters* and of the stock of *Cain*, called *men*, by way of *contempt* and *distinction*, as being such as had only the nature and qualities of mere *corrupt men*, without the image of God, without any thing of *holiness* or *virtue*, or *resemblance* of their maker.

This was the immediate occasion of *ensnaring* the godly into the worship of idols, and consequently into all the corruptions and iniquities, into all the lewdnesses and abominations practised among the Heathens, and even in their religious institutions. This was
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the *beginning* of their ruin and confusion, for from these promiscuous marriages proceeded, as it is said, the race of *Giants*, that is, men so called, not so much for their *vast and high stature*, as their monstrous and *foul dispositions*; they were contemners of God, and enemies to virtue, who lived by fraud and rapine, and filled all places with violence and cruelty; *men* that having got power into their hands oppressed and tyrannized over their fellow creatures, and were as a *scourge* in the hand of providence to a wicked age; *men*, remarkable perhaps for great strength and courage, and in those corrupted times accounted *men of renown*, that is, *famous in their generation*; but, it was only for their *infamous* and horrid impieties, for their insatiable pride and ambition, for their tyranny and barbarity to mankind. Hence arose a general dissolution of manners, and *thus* the whole race of *Adam* became corrupt; *the earth was filled with violence*, so far, *that it repented God that he had made man*, and it grieved him at his heart.

However, the Spirit of Christ, which influenced his holy prophets, *Enoch* and *Noah*, continued to admonish and exhort those wicked men, till the deluge overwhelmed them all; when their souls were removed from the prison of their bodies, to that horrible dun-
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geon appointed for them, where they are kept bound in fetters of darkness, to receive their final sentence at the day of judgment.

Having thus stated what seems to be the *plain* and *obvious* sense of the text, I shall beg leave,

II. To offer the *following observations and reflections* on what has been said, And,

1st, From hence it appears, that the spirits here said to have been *in prison*, and to whom our Lord *preached by the Spirit*, were not such, as the *Romanists* fondly dream are confined in *Purgatory*; a *notion* without the least foundation in reason or scripture. It is plain, they were the spirits or souls of those wicked men only, that lived before the flood, *which were in prison* while they lived upon earth, as being *captives* to sin and Satan: But whatever became of them after death, we do not find that Christ ever preached to them *then*: *His spirit strove* no longer with them than *an hundred and twenty years*; after which, as they were cut off for their sins, and died in *impenitency*, it is most natural to believe, they were clapped up in that more dismal *prison*, the dark mansion appointed for the souls of wicked men, where they are confined without offers of mercy,
without

without hope of enlargement, till the great and general judgment of the world.

For, whatever place be appointed to receive the souls of the wicked, it is certain, their condition is so bad, as never to be *changed* or altered for a better. The rich glutton is represented by our Lord to have been sent to hell, as soon as he died; for *in hell he lift up his eyes, and saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom*; he saw, indeed, something of the glories of heaven, but he *saw* at the same time a *gulph impassable between*, and not the least hope of his own release out of that place of torment. For as our Lord assures us in another place, when once the poor criminal enters the gates of that *woful prison*, he can never come out, till he has paid the very last mite, that is, *never*; an eternity of sorrow being every where said to be the portion of those that die in enmity with God.

2dly, Hence we observe the miserable and calamitous state of obstinate and impenitent sinners, even in this world; they are *really* in prison, even whilst they flatter themselves with the free enjoyment of their *reason* and *liberty*; they are *slaves* to their own lusts and passions, whilst they seem to *lord* it over others; they are captives of Satan, that grand
tyrant

tyrant and enemy of souls; and even whilst they walk about the earth, *revelling in sin*, and breaking through all the restraints of religion and decency, they are *bondslaves* and *prisoners* of hell, and lie under the sentence of death and damnation.

It is true, wicked men are apt to *boast*, as the *Jews* did, *we were never in bondage to any man*, and are ready to abuse the charity of such as would set them free: But what says our Lord in reply? *He that committeth sin, is the servant of sin*, John viii. 34. that is, Whosoever does wilfully and habitually indulge himself in a sinful course, is under the *servitude* and *thralldom* of sin; and to live in sin, is the vilest and worst of slavery.

Sin makes men slaves to all intents and purposes; it deprives them of the power of judging and acting like *free agents*, and subjects them to the arbitrary will of the worst of tyrants. It takes from them the use both of their reason and senses, and turns them into beasts; it renders them *blind* to their true interest, *deaf* to good advice, and incapable of passing a true judgment on things; they take *evil for good*, *darkness for light*, and *bitter for sweet*; and whilst they are thinking to enjoy themselves and their pleasures, and make the most of life,
they

they are only working out their own death and destruction; they are a driving *like oxen to the slaughter, or as fools to the house of correction.*

3dly, We observe hence, that the present life is the only time of instruction and amendment. The Spirit of Christ preached to the *spirits* of those wicked men in *prison*, but then it was only whilst *here* upon earth. There are no conditions to be proposed, no terms of salvation to be offered after death; no *wisdom* or *device*, or *knowledge in the grave*. This is the only season of grace, and mercy; that which follows is the time of *judgment*.

Christ preached to these prisoners, as he does to all the like sinners at this day, in order to prevent their eternal imprisonment and condemnation; and Oh! may they lay hold of redemption whilst it is offered, may they hasten and fly for their lives, while the door of their prison is set open, and before it be for ever *shut* upon them.

4thly, And to conclude. Hence we cannot but lament the obstinate folly and infidelity of the old world: How amazing was their *stupidity*! that after an hundred and twenty years preaching, no more than

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eight

eight souls could be persuaded to be saved. From the beginning, we find, the prophets of God have had cause to complain, that few have *believed their report*.

But *have the workers of iniquity no knowledge*, not even the common sense to discern good or evil? Could one imagine it *necessary* to use many words to persuade men from leaping into a pit, or running into the fire; to take great pains to argue a sick man into a desire of health, or make a prisoner contented to have his shackles knocked off, and set at liberty?

One would think all this needless, but experience tells us, sin is so stupifying as to make men insensible of the danger, though never so *near*, never so *terrible*. In other cases it is not so: A man that is sick, is seldom so in love with his distemper as to be *patient* without a physician; but be our souls ever so sick, we are fond of our disease, fight against our physician, and spurn at our remedy.

The height of distraction this! as if we were bent on our own ruin, and resolved to make away ourselves for ever. O may we all now, *in this our day*, see and practise the *things belonging to our peace, before they are hid from our eyes*. May we attend to the silent dictates of God's holy spirit within
us,

SPIRITS *in* PRISON. 323

us, that so we may be led by his inspiration to the knowledge of God's truth in this world, and to life everlasting in that which is to come.

S E R M O N XXII.

Of the T R I N I T Y.

I C O R. viii. 6.

But to us there is but one God—

AS the belief of a God is the ground of all religion in general, so the foundation of the Christian religion seems to be the belief of a Trinity, *that is*, three distinct persons in one and the same divine essence.

The light of reason will satisfy every man that carefully attends to it, that *there is a God*, an eternal Almighty Being, from whom every thing that exists has derived its original; but that there should be one God in *Trinity*, is discovered only by the help of divine revelation.

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This revelation is contained chiefly in the Books of the *New Testament*, where this great doctrine is delivered in the most perspicuous terms, and into the belief of which every Christian is baptized.

However, as the pride of some men will not permit them to believe, what their shallow reason cannot comprehend, great opposition has been made to this essential article of our faith; and this very text in particular has with great triumph been urged against it, *To us there is but one God.*

The apostle in this chapter is mentioning a case concerning *things offered to idols*, from which he would advise Christians to abstain, that they might not give offence to tender consciences; not but that *we know*, says he, *that an Idol is nothing in the world*, that is, it is a mere vanity, (it is no God, as is pretended; there is nothing of a deity in it, and nothing of a deity could be represented by it) and *there is no other God but one.* For *though there be that are called Gods, whether in heaven or in earth*, as the Heathens worshipped a *plurality of Gods, celestial and terrestrial*; they had *Gods many, and Lords many*; yet the Christian religion tells us otherwise, *with us there is but one God*, one living and true God, the author and creator of all things, to whom all our prayers are to be directed; and one mediator, by whom they

must be offered: *To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.* This was the doctrine of the Old Testament, Deut. iv. 35. *Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else besides him.* And again, Chap. vi. 4. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.* So, Isaiah xlv. v. *I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me.* The same truth we find asserted in the New Testament: *This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent,* John 17. 3. And so the apostle, 1 Tim. ii. 5. *For there is one God.* And indeed it is as impossible there should be more, as none at all.

In the following discourse then I shall observe,

- I. The Unity of the Deity, that God is but one.
- II. I shall endeavour to shew, how far the Unity of the Deity may be reconciled with the *Christian belief* of a *Trinity* of Persons. And,
- III. Make some proper inferences from the whole.

I. As

I. As for the Unity of the Deity (*there is but one God*) this appears,

1. From the *nature* of God. He is the first of causes, the last of ends; from him all things proceed, on him they depend, and in him they terminate. This is the natural conception we have of God.

Now, it is absurd to suppose, that all things proceed from one independent cause, and yet that there should be a plurality of causes independent; that there is one supreme end, and yet a plurality of ends that are supreme.

Accordingly, the most wise and learned among the Heathens, discovered by the light of nature, that there was but one supreme God, and that all others which were so called, were *subordinate* to him; and tho' in a compliance with the multitude, they were led to worship many Gods, they seemed convinced within themselves, there was but one supreme Being. *Divum Pater atque hominum Rex.* And this appears evident likewise,

2. From that natural homage and worship we owe to the deity. That we should *worship* that God who gave us being, is highly reasonable; but were we to believe a multiplicity of Gods, how could our
Y 4 souls

souls be determined to the actual adoration of any one?

It is a proposition eternally true, that *no man can serve two masters*. They may impose *different*, if not, contrary commands; and how will this distract our minds, and render our obedience *impossible*?

This therefore is the foundation of the moral law, that *we have no other Gods but one: Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God: Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might, Deut. vi. 4, 5.*

We are to consider God, as the complete and adequate object of our affections; and this is but *one*, there can be no other besides him.

With us then, *there is but one God.*—

II. But it will be said, how is this *Unity* of the Godhead consistent with the Christian belief of a *Trinity of Persons*? This is the second point to be considered, and a very material one it is.

But here it must be acknowledged, that human reason is lost and confounded, not able to conceive, much less describe, the nature of a divine and infinite Being. *Behold*, as it is said in the book of *Job*, chap. xxxvi. 26. *God is great, and we know him not, nor can*

can the number of his years be searched out. The knowledge of God is too *wonderful*, too *high*, for our weak faculties to attain to.

In *points* of morality, or matters of fact, *reason* may be able to assist us, but in things purely divine, it is puzzled, and particularly in respect to the Trinity, it cannot clearly conceive how *these things can be*. All it can do, consists in the following particulars.

1. Reason will inform us, that many things, which seem impossible and absurd with men, are possible and highly reasonable with God, *Matt. xix. 26. For my thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor my ways your ways, saith the Lord, Isa. lv. 8.*

There is a vast disproportion between an *infinite object* and a *finite faculty*, between the perfections of the divine Being, and the weakness of human understanding; and yet, some have been so extremely in love with the shadow of their own reason, that they have advanced it as the sole standard of divine revelation, and will believe nothing which they cannot comprehend.

The *Socinians*, for instance, will have reason only to guide them, and this seems very fair; but then let them consult their reason, and this will tell them, that it is altogether

altogether as absurd, to make reason the measure of faith, as to make sense the measure of reason.

Were we to take the information of *sense* only, we should believe the sun, moon, and stars, to be very *small* and inconsiderable in themselves; but *reason* will correct this error, by representing the vast distance of those heavenly bodies, and the incapacity of *sense* to judge of their magnitude: And, why may not *faith*, in things supernatural, be admitted to correct the mistakes, and deplume the pride of reason? Can man be supposed to *know* as much as his Maker? Are there not many things, which seem impossible and incredible to a child, or an illiterate, which appear highly rational and intelligible to the learned? And whence is this? but from the difference of their natures and faculties?

Every creature therefore, and every faculty, must keep within its proper sphere, and cannot be allowed to be a competent judge of things, which surpass the utmost stretch of its capacity.

Had the wise disputers of this age the humility of children, or the sense to consider themselves only as men, *frail, fallible, short-sighted*, they would be better qualified, as well to receive the holy mysteries of
grace,

grace, as to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

But their darling position, that nothing should be believed which cannot be comprehended, is no less *absurd* in reason, than *impious* in divinity.

2. Reason will tell us, there may be as much said against many of the ordinary phenomena of nature, as against the sacred Trinity. It is *unintelligible*, they say, how there can be three *persons* in one *essence*; how the Father is God, the Son God, and the Holy Ghost God, and yet, not three, but one God? Now, to such I would reply, as Almighty God once did to *Job*, chap. xxxviii. 2. *Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Hast thou considered the flux of the sea, the motion of the wind, the loadstone's inclination to the arctic pole? Or hast thou surveyed the frame of thy own constitution, the union of soul and body, the cohesion of matter, &c.*

These, and many others I could mention, are *unintelligible*; they are mysteries and *problems*, which could never yet be explained by the most subtle wit of man: And, if things in nature and art, which are the daily objects of sense, and to which the conceptions of our minds are commensurate, be involved, notwithstanding, in such difficulties,

culties, as with all our study, we are not able to solve; why should it be thought feasible, to find out the Almighty to perfection? Alas! we know not the things before our eyes, and how should we know God? His essence is unfathomable: *It is high as heaven, what canst thou do? It is deep as hell, what canst thou know?*

It is inconceivable to our understandings, how any thing can be of itself from all eternity, without any cause of its Being; how all things were first made out of nothing, &c. Such propositions as these, I say, are inconceivable; and yet our reason obliges us to receive them, or we must run into downright absurdity and self-contradiction.

3. Reason will further teach us, that however seemingly strange or incredible this doctrine of a Trinity may at first appear, yet, if it be evident that God has revealed it, we ought to assent. It is *folly*, I grant, and not modesty, to embrace any doctrine, which *contradicts* a principle of reason; for this is an excellency given us to distinguish things that differ. But as the doctrine of the Trinity can never be proved contrary to reason, tho' it be above it; so it is certain, God may as justly require our assent to some truths, which seem repugnant to reason, as our obedience to some precepts, which are re-

repugnant to our nature; that is, he may, and does require obedience of the understanding, as well as of the will and affections. So that whatever God has been pleased to reveal, be it ever so difficult to be understood, it ought to be received with reverence; and our own present incapacity to judge of it, can be no good plea for infidelity.

Nothing more remains for our reason to do, but only to examine, whether the doctrine of a Trinity be revealed and clearly proposed to our understandings in the holy Scripture.

And here, the word *Trinity*, indeed, is not found in Scripture in the sense it is used by divines; but then it must be allowed, (which is the same) that there are Three spoken of by the names of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in whose name every Christian is *baptized*; and to each of which, the highest titles and attributes of God are ascribed. And, though the word *person* likewise be not used, yet, there are Three spoken of, with as much distinction from one another, as we are used to speak of three several persons, or three intelligent agents, which we can have no conception of but under the notion of persons; though we are not to understand the word *Person*, when applied to the Trinity, as we do of human persons;
for

for these are three distinct men, but the persons in the Godhead are united. *Go ye, teach all nations*, says our Lord to his apostles, *baptizing them in the name of the father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, that is, into the Faith and profession of the three Persons in the Godhead; which seems to make the divinity of each, the *object* of a Christian's faith.

So in that solemn form of benediction used by the apostle, *The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Ghost, &c.* This manifestly infers the *divinity* of each, for in what name should man be blessed, but in the name of God? So again, *There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one*, 1 John v. 7.

That there are three persons then in the divine Essence, three Subsistencies in one undivided infinite Nature, seems to be the *express* doctrine of the *New Testament*. We cannot deny, but it is revealed in so many words, and proposed as a point of faith: But how this can be conceived or explained, how there can be three Persons, and yet one God, this, I say, is infinitely above the *comprehension* of man, with all humility to be adored, and not curiously pryed into: It is
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an *article of faith*, not an object of *human science*; and, indeed, nothing has so much disparaged the greatness of this mystery, or given greater advantage to infidelity, than the pretended explanations and comments which have been made upon it. Cautious therefore of running into the same inconveniencies, I shall beg leave,

III. To conclude this discourse, with the following inferences from what has been said.

1. Hence we see, that reason alone must not be the *only Guide* in the mysterious articles of faith, and especially *that* under consideration.

If our reason assures us it is revealed, *that is sufficient*, it can proceed no higher; and therefore, for men to pretend to prove the adorable Trinity to be inconsistent with, or contrary to reason, is a vain and foolish attempt, and what they will never be able to do; because it is a subject which their reason can never thoroughly comprehend.

So, on the other hand, they that endeavour to explain the mystery of faith, by the model of reason, take the ready way to dissolve the mystery and destroy the faith, and indeed, put a great affront upon the divine reason, on which the mystery is founded,

founded, and *to which*, it is fit all human reason should ever submit itself.

2. Is it not reasonable to suppose, that God, in his nature and manner of existence, must infinitely transcend our comprehension? We may *apprehend* something of him, but *how* can we *comprehend* him? Could we do so, he were not God, whose high prerogative it is, to be incomprehensible.

Who can pretend to understand an infinite being, but an infinite understanding? And, as for us *poor creatures*, we can give but a dark, imperfect account at present, either of the heavenly bodies above us, of the common appearances of things about us, or, even of our own spirit within us. Nay, the composition of the least and most inconsiderable insect, is sufficient to puzzle a whole college of Philosophers. And, how unsearchable then must be the God of all these things, how infinitely must he exceed the utmost reach of our imaginations, and what arrogance is it to attempt to fathom the depths of God, with the short line of human reason! And therefore, I would ask farther,

3. Is it not reasonable for us to believe what God has plainly and expressly revealed of himself, though the thing revealed be
above

above and *beyond* our reason: For what can be a stronger ground of faith, than divine revelation? What can make any thing credible, if this cannot? It is satisfaction enough to an humble understanding, to a devout Soul, that God has said it: God, I say, who is of infinite wisdom, and cannot be deceived himself; of infinite goodness, and will not deceive us.

And, though the doctrine of a Trinity must be acknowledged to be vastly *superior* to reason, yet it cannot be said to *contradict* it: Many instances have been produced from nature, to shew it *does not*; as, that there are three distinct faculties of the reasonable soul, the understanding, the will, the memory; which yet do not essentially differ, but all together constitute and compleat the mind of man: That from the same substance of fire, there is a three-fold emanation of flame, heat and light.

But *these*, it must be owned, and all others whatsoever that can be urged of this kind, are *mean, unworthy* comparisons; and one might justly reprove such men, as the Prophet does the *Israelites*, *Isa. xl. 18. Whereunto will ye liken God?*

The greatest scholars and most eminent divines, if they have any *humility* with their *learning*, must confess, they are all ideots, when they come to treat on *these*
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mysteries. Nor can we think or speak any thing of God, without a preface of reverence, without asking pardon of his incomprehensible Majesty.

It is sufficient therefore for us, it is the safest method we can take, as well as most suitable to the glory of the mystery, so to conceive, so to discourse of God, as he himself has been pleased to direct us in his holy Word.

Wherefore, to conclude: As we have all professed ourselves Christians, have been baptized into the faith of the Holy Trinity, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; as we hope to be saved only by the mercies of God the Father, through the merits of his Son Jesus Christ, and by the continual grace and assistance of his Holy Spirit, let us persevere stedfastly in this faith, and devote ourselves to the service and worship of that adorable Trinity, to whom be ever ascribed all honour, praise and obedience.

SERMON XXIII.

RELIGION *the true* PATH to HONOUR.

P R O V. iii. 16.

*Length of days is in her right hand, and
in her left hand, riches and honour.*

IT is the last of these advantages of true wisdom and virtue, viz. it's tending to promote a man's true honour and reputation, that I design to consider from these words. This is a blessing much more desirable than the foregoing, in the judgment of *Solomon*, who says, *A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches*, Prov. xxi. 1. This not only qualifies a man to be serviceable in this world, but will survive and follow him into the next.

By *honour*, or a good name, is understood, that esteem and respect a man receives from the world, on the score of some noble actions or accomplishments, which serve to the benefit of mankind, and to which, for that reason, they cannot forbear shewing a due acknowledgment of praise. Now there are two things, and no more, that properly entitle a man to this respect and esteem; and those are, *1st*, his internal worth and excellency; and, *2^{dly}*, his usefulness and serviceableness to the world. But the first of these is always to be tried and discovered by the last; for, the real worth of things can be measured no other way, but by the *profit* or *advantage* they are capable of procuring us.

The sole end and design of every created being, was to serve some wise purpose of God or man; and, so far as it is instrumental to this end, it is accounted *good* and *valuable*.

Men are not to be valued only by their *trappings*, no more than other creatures; they are not to be considered for their outward grandeur, the *largeness* of their estates, or the *glory* of their titles; but by their inward virtue, and the good they do in the world.

True honour belongs to virtue, and indeed to nothing else. Thus an earthly king, when

when he confers honour on any of his subjects, in resemblance to the King of heaven, will first of all consider the *merit* of the person he promotes; and, it is the noble achievements, the great services he has done his king and country, on which all his honours and titles are founded; so that though the king be the sole fountain of honour, the free, *arbitrary* dispenser of it to whom he pleases, yet, he is so far tied down, by rule and precedent, that he never bestows it but upon real or supposed virtue; and therefore, in the creation of peers, their virtues are recited in the preamble, before he grants a patent for that promotion.

And, as this is the only standard by which the king measures the worth of, and bestows honour upon, his subjects; so it is the only rule whereby his subjects can proportion their esteem for those *he delights to honour*.

True nobility then does not consist in high birth and titles, in riches and worldly pomp; these things may draw the eyes and admiration of the vulgar, but abstracted from virtue, they are vain and *contemptible*; for whatever respect is paid to persons thus *distinguished*, proceeds only from our *opinion* of their virtues, and usefulness to their country; take away this, and they demand no more than a bare *outward respect*.

I confess, as for magistrates and such as are in offices of authority, there is an *inward reverence* due, by reason of their relation to the king, and to God himself, whose ministers they are; but this is founded properly on the great service they do the world, and on their being *the ministers of God to us for good*. The relation they bear to, and the authority they derive from God, whereby they become a terror to vice and the patrons of virtue, do justly require an inward veneration, as well as a conscientious obedience from us.

Thus, true honour is always built on the basis of virtue; without this, the titles of honour are but empty names, and let men be ever so highly dignified and distinguished by these, they can challenge no further honour thereby, than as their *real* virtues deserve.

It is religion therefore, and this only, that tends to the advancement of a man's reputation, and renders him truly honourable and respected in the world. This makes him useful to his fellow creatures, and exalts him above his brethren; so that he is called, by way of eminence, the *Excellent of the earth*, *Psalms* x. 3. For,

1. Consider the religious man in *himself*.
He is one that endeavours to live by the rules
of

of right reason, to moderate his passions, and restore the image of God upon his soul; the loss of which is properly the loss of honour, and what has left but little distinction, at present, between man and beast. He aspires to be like God, the best of Beings; *to be holy, as God is holy*: And the truest and nearest resemblance a man can bear to his Maker, is in *holiness*: For this is the *Image of God in man*, as the Apostle tells us, *Eph. iv. 24. Put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

And what greater honour can there be, than to *be like God* in that which is the glory of all his other perfections? *Who is like thee, O Lord, among the Gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness?* *Exod. xv. 11.*

For this reason, sin is the most *infamous*, dishonourable thing in the world, because it is a *defection* from, or a *destruction* of this holiness, as it blots out the image of God in man. The loss of this disfigured those *once bright* angels of light, degraded them from their everlasting glory, and threw them down into prisons of darkness; and, the want of it makes men resemble these *now deformed* and evil spirits, and fits them for their *company* hereafter. In the Holy Scriptures, God has been pleased to set peculiar marks of honour on the religious: *Them*

that honour me, I will honour, 1 Sam. ii. 30. And he whom God delights to honour, shall be honoured indeed: So, Psalm xci. 14, 15. I will set him up on high, because he has known my name; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver, and bring him to honour. He has put so remarkable a distinction between virtue and vice, that the one always goes under the honourable name of wisdom, and the other is branded with that of folly: That man being a greater fool that abuses his reason, than he that wants it.

Good men are called precious, Lam. iv. 2. And wicked men vile, Psalm xv. 4. The righteous wheat; and the wicked chaff, Matt. iii. 12. These reprobate silver, the others fine gold; these dross, the others jewels, Mal. iii. 17. These briars and thorns, the others a noble vine, Jer. vi. 30. Lam. iv. 2. So that if we judge by the word of God, and as he himself judgeth, who is the supreme fountain of honour, we must not rate the worth of men by outward appearance, John vii. 24. For man that is in honour, says the Psalmist, and has no understanding, that is, has no virtue, no right use of his reason, is like to the beasts that perish, Psalm xlix. 20. It is religion only that can distinguish and set him above other creatures, that can truly ennoble his person, and perpetuate his memory in the standing records of fame. Because this,

2. Will

2. Will oblige him to live up to the great ends for which he was created, the glory of God, and the good of *mankind*; by which alone, the goodness and worth of all things is to be measured.

Now, if we consider a religious man under this view, as promoting, to the utmost of his ability, the welfare and happiness of mankind, always going about doing good, assisting the indigent, instructing the ignorant, shedding his benign influences, like the Great God of heaven, on all, both *just and unjust*, employing every talent he has to the benefit of man, and the glory of our common Creator; what can more deserve our esteem and veneration?

On the contrary, consider a man void of a sense of religion: What is he, but a rebel against God and his own reason? enslaved by sin, and his worse than brutish lusts; doing things against the persuasions of his own conscience, and which he condemns himself for doing, and fears the more dreadful condemnation of God hereafter; and yet, still going on to do them, and incapable of doing better: Consider him, I say, not only as an *absurd, inconsistent* wretch in himself, that never did good to himself; but also, as unqualified to do good to any one else.

For

For whatever abilities he may have, he either knows not how, or else will not employ them as he ought; he has no other views, than the gratifying his own humour, and if ever he does good, it is by *chance*, and for some narrow, selfish ends of his own, to swell his own pride or ambition, and not out of any real benevolence to mankind. It is his peculiar delight to do mischief, for he envies the happiness, and rejoices at the misfortunes of his neighbour; all the thoughts and imaginations of his heart *being only evil*, and that *continually*. And where now can we find a wretch so mean and contemptible, so worthless and vile in himself, and so detestable in the sight of God and man?

Sin is such a *blemish* to human nature, that even the most profligate are sometimes ashamed of it. There is none but the most abandoned, that glory in their sins: None in his right senses, but thinks it a shame and reproach to him. What is it that makes your hypocrites put on the disguise of religion, and wear the *form*, when they deny the power of godliness, but that they think it a *credit* and *advantage* to their character? Nay, even those that are professed enemies to virtue *themselves*, will love and commend it in *others*. The drunkard will praise and encourage sobriety in his children and servants:

wants: The common cheat, that makes no scruple to defraud others, would not be served so himself; and though he sells by false weights and measures, he loves to buy by true ones. The adulterer that defiles his neighbour's bed, would have his own kept chaste and undefiled.

Was there any reputation in sin, why should men hide it? Why do they excuse it, and seek the corners and covers of darkness for the commission of it? Why is it not owned by its servants and abettors, and *called* by its proper name? Why does it not appear in its own complexion, but put on the paint and colours of virtue? Why only, because men are ashamed of it, as being a scandal and blot upon their character. And so indeed it must be, as long as the world endures, notwithstanding all the attempts of wicked men to the contrary.

For, can that be an honour to a man, which deprives him of his reason, degrades him below himself, and renders him worse than a beast? That defiles his conscience, separates him from God, and ruins his soul for ever?

So *vile* and *infamous* is sin, so noble and honourable is religion! For this being the very *reverse*, as much as that *degrades*, this must *exalt* our nature.

And

And this, indeed, has ever been the opinion of all the sober part of mankind: The Heathens always made honour the reward of virtue, and would never give it to any thing else. The *Egyptians*, in their hieroglyphicks, painted it between *humility* and *labour*. And the old *Romans* so placed their temples, that he that would go to the temple of *honour*, was forced to pass through the temple of *virtue*: As if they had built this notion on that excellent aphorism in the *Proverbs*, *Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people*. Indeed, such they found it, and so have all nations in the world besides. The prosperity of the *Roman* state is, by two of the fathers, ascribed to the virtue and sobriety of that people; as its declension was owing to the vices and corruption of their posterity.

The Heroes of all ages were made such by their virtues, and when in any of their achievements they deviated from *virtue*, they became the themes of a school declamation more properly than the subjects of *real praise*.

As a man cannot justly be reproached for any thing, but the *abuse* of his reason and free-will, which is *sin*; so nothing deserves commendation but the right use and exercise of it, which consists in *virtue*; and this it never fails of. A religious man may be
poor,

poor, and miserable, and afflicted in the world; but then he is one of those of *whom the world is not worthy*, Heb. xi. 37. And he is always respected as such, by those that know him; or, if he be not honoured here, he shall be hereafter, by God and Christ, and all the glorious spirits of heaven, at the great day of retribution. *For the memory of the just is blessed*; and when *the name of the wicked shall rot*, Prov. x. 7, *the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance*, Psalm cxii. 6.

Among the many virtues that render men beloved and esteemed in the world, there are two particularly that contribute very much to this end; and they are *wisdom* and *courage*. The reason why these virtues are accounted so honourable and excellent, is, because, by the one, a man has the free exercise of those powers and abilities, which make our nature superior to that of other creatures; and, by the other, can preserve a due sovereignty over his passions, so as to surmount all the miseries of life, and learn those two great lessons to *do* and *suffer* as he ought. For the same reason, the two contrary vices are reckoned of all others the most ignominious, there being no greater disgrace than to be a *fool* or a *coward*. Now, these two virtues are really found no where, but in the man influenced by religion. For,

I. As

1. As for *wisdom*, this is so nearly related, so essential to religion, that it is always in Scripture called *wisdom*; they so closely resemble each other in their natures and properties, that the same definition, the philosophers give of *wisdom*, is true of *religion*. For wisdom, they say, is an inclination or ability, to make choice of right means in the prosecution of true happiness; and, what does religion do, but direct us to the means of attaining true felicity, both in this world and the next?

2. As for *courage*, nothing but religion can inspire a man with true courage. A man may be bold and daring, and throw himself down a precipice, without fear or wit, (*as all wicked men do*) but this is *foolhardiness*, and no very commendable character. Would a man meet danger, death or disgrace, with a becoming decency and a true bravery of mind, he must be supported by a good conscience, and secure a provision in another world; without this, his heart will fail him, and his mind be in confusion. It would shock the stoutest man that ever breathed, to look death in the face, when he can see nothing but *darkness* or *misery* behind it.

The

The courage of wicked men is but a false and forced courage; it is like what we sometimes see in cowards, the effect of fear and desperation: *The wicked flee, when no man pursueth; but the righteous is bold as a lion.* His courage is true, rational, sedate, invincible, and sustains him under all the terrors of life or death.

Thus, I hope, I have sufficiently shewn what I proposed, *viz.* that the paths of religion are the true paths of honour, and that there is no other way to rise in the esteem of mankind, but by the practice of virtue. I am sensible, what I have said will appear extremely *ridiculous* to many in the present dissolute age, that endeavour to advance their reputation, by ways directly contrary to what I have been recommending, even by open profaneness and a contempt of all religion.

But, I hope, as bad as the world is, they seldom gain their ends; for, however they may flatter themselves, they are so far from being entitled to the reputation of being men either of wit or courage, as they affect to be, that, I will venture to affirm, they are of all others the greatest both *fools* and *cowards*.

Fools, in *mistaking* their best and truest interest, in fixing on a vile unworthy end, and pursuing it by such means as are sure

to fail; there being none so much despised, as they truly deserve, by the wiser part of mankind, as those who aspire after honour by the contempt of their Maker. For, it is the positive declaration of God himself, *They that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.*

And truly, if we only consider the nature of things, what can be more absurd, than to affect to raise our fame by the methods of infamy? To aspire after greatness by making one's self odious and contemptible? To raise a mighty fabrick on a bottom that will sink under the weight?

Fools, again, in venturing their souls on such hazards, as all men of sense would condemn for folly and madness in the trivial concerns of life: And not only *fools*, but *cowards* too, who are more afraid of little difficulties, because *present*, than the greatest danger, because future and at a distance; had rather venture the wrath of the eternal God, than disoblige their own lusts; rather than charge the enemy, they basely desert their colours, and incur the penalty of dying in disgrace by the *martial law*.

God forbid, that any of us should endeavour to obtain a reputation, by such weak and scandalous methods as these; or indeed, on any other foundation than that of virtue and religion, because honour will never stand firm on any other bottom: But fixed
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on this, it will survive the shock of death and time, it will pass the scrutiny of the great day, be approved of by the heraldry of heaven, and when all other honours fail, and tumble into dust and oblivion, this will eternize our fame in Heaven, and be a diadem of immortal glory on our heads, a *crown incorruptible*, that never *fadeth away*.

S E R M O N XXIV.

No Joy but in doing GOOD.

E C C L E S. iii. 12.

I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and do good in his life.

THIS Book is supposed to be written by *Solomon*, towards the close of his life, as a recantation of his error, in departing from the worship of the true God to *that* of idols; and, he declares herein to all posterity, what sorrow and regret he had conceived for his lamentable fall, and how earnestly he detested all those pleasures and delights, whereby he had been seduced, as *vanity and vexation of spirit*, as incapable of affording any solid peace or content of mind, much less
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of leading him to the enjoyment of his supreme good, eternal happiness.

His design throughout, is to invite and conduct all others, by his example, to piety and virtue, as being the only paths to true felicity. To which end, he first of all gives us a brief relation of his own course of life, and of those things men are wont to pursue with the utmost diligence and application, supposing to find happiness and satisfaction in them, but that *he* had found them all to be *Vanity*; such as tempted men to sin by promising them pleasures, and expired always in *vexation* and disquiet.

From hence, he exhorts all men to resign themselves to the conduct of true wisdom, that is, religion: To fear God and apply themselves to good works: *This* being the only way to give us a true relish and pleasure in the enjoyments of this world: *I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and do good in his life.*

Whatever we may fondly imagine or expect from them, *I know, (says he, by a dearly purchased experience) that there is no good in them, but then only, when we make them instruments of doing good; then may we truly rejoice in them, then only do these vain and transitory possessions administer a real joy, a solid, durable pleasure, when we*

employ them to the service and benefit of mankind.

And how incontestible the opinion of this great man was, in the matter before us, appears from hence, in that he had both *wisdom* and *wealth* in a larger proportion, than *any* before or after him; he could want no advantages, neither sense nor experience, to form a just and adequate judgment. Had there been any real happiness in the pleasures of this world, it is impossible but so extraordinary a person, who had all things at his command, *kept nothing from his eyes that they desired, nor withheld his heart from any joy*, (as he himself tells us, *chap. ii. 10.*) who made the most curious and critical enquiries into every thing here below, it is impossible but such a man must have discovered it; (and perhaps God permitted him to make so *bold a use* of his knowledge and capacities, to shew us the weakness and folly of all worldly pursuits.) For alas! after the closest and most diligent search, after he had ransacked the whole creation, examined into and experienced every thing in nature, behold the *result of his studies*, he is disappointed and fatigued, and pronounces *all* to be *vanity and vexation*.

It is true, every thing was *created good*, and the good things of this world were intended for the comfort and refreshment of
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of mankind; but by our abuse and misapplication, they become *vain*; that is, when we employ them to the pampering of *pride* and *luxury*, when we suffer them to steal away our hearts from God and virtue, or expect greater happiness from them, than they were by nature furnished to afford us: In this case the vanity we charge *them* with, is *justly and properly our own*; and, when we are cheated and ruined by their inconstancy, the fault is not in *them*, but *ourselves*; it is not owing to their *deficiency*, but our own *folly*.

We are naturally apt to entertain large hopes from worldly enjoyments: The riches, honours, and pleasures of this life, are what we are taught from the very cradle to pursue, as things that can make us truly great and happy; and, had we no other demands but those of the body to provide for, this world might satisfy us. But we feel something within us, vast and extensive in its desires; we find ourselves capable of and craving after greater happiness, than this world can give; we find the soul is not to be satisfied with meat and drink, with wealth and sensual pleasures: *Man cannot live by bread alone.*

And yet, *this is our folly*; we think our *houses shall continue for ever*, that our lands and estates can supply the soul as well as the

body with all conveniencies; we look upon these things as fixed and permanent, which are *vain* and *fleeting*; and because, through the delusion of a strong fancy, we imagine ourselves at home, when we are only upon our journey, and expect better accommodations than are possible to be had; for this reason it is, that we find ourselves so sadly disappointed in all the satisfactions of this world, that we hear such complaints of the misery of this life, and our big hopes of happiness sink into *vanity and vexation of spirit*.

But did we know how to use the good things of this world, or had we the wisdom to use them in such a manner, and for such purposes, as God and nature have prescribed and directed, there would be no room for such complaints, because no danger of being thus deceived and undone by them. And this now is what the wise preacher has pointed out, in the passage before us; he has here taught us *how to use this world*, so as *not to abuse it, nor be abused* by it; how to keep the pleasures of sense from being a *vexation* to the spirit; how to make that which is *vanity*, become subservient to the attainment of *substantial felicity*: Which there is but one way in the world to do, and that is, *to rejoice, and do good, &c.*

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The great and principal ends for which the divine bounty has given man the free enjoyment of worldly blessings, are but these two, 1. That he should *rejoice*; and, 2. *Do good in his life*. And surely, no man would desire to be upon happier terms with his Maker, since he is permitted *first* to please himself, to take what is sufficient for his own refreshment; and *then* out of his *abundance* and *superfluities* to administer to the wants of others.

A wise man is temperate in all things; amidst all the delicacies of the most richly spread table, he desires no more than what may restore and exhilarate nature; and, a generous, hospitable man loves to communicate, is as much pleased in another's satisfaction as his own; by contributing to another's happiness, he receives an addition to his own; and indeed, never rejoices so much as when it is in his power to make others rejoice with him.

For this reason, a man of a narrow, sordid disposition, in the largest affluence of worldly blessings, never enjoys himself in *any*; he has no real satisfaction in what he seems to possess, because he is afraid to part with it, and is never the better for it himself, because he will suffer none else to *be so*.

But in order to a wise improvement of the good things of this world, we are here directed,

I. To rejoice in them.

II. To do Good. For,

III. There is no other way to extract any *real* happiness from the enjoyment of them, but by thus *doing good* with them. And,

I. That men may *rejoice* in the good things of life: This we are told, (in the verse following the text) *is the gift of God*; it is freely allowed to all, and most men are ready enough to take their portion herein; all the danger is, lest they should debase and spoil their joy, and not rejoice in these things, as they are the *gift of God*.

Men are extremely apt to rejoice in their wealth, honours, and worldly acquisitions, as if they were the product of their own skill, the effect of their own industry and contrivance; and so flattering themselves, they acquired them by their own power, they are tempted to think they have a right to use them according to their own pleasures. But all such rejoicing is no better than that presumptuous boast of king *Nebuchadnezzar*,
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when he said to himself, *Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?* For which, there came a voice to him immediately, *The kingdom is departed from thee*, Dan. iv. 31. It is an impious mistake, to imagine these things to be the natural issue of human dexterity, which are the free donations of God's bounty. It is *his blessing* only that *maketh rich*; and, if we would make riches a blessing, we must enjoy them as *such*, with all due thankfulness and acknowledgments to the *supreme Donor*, with temperance and moderation, that we forget not the giver, nor the ends for which they were given. A religious sense of the divine goodness would refine and sublimate these earthly comforts, and give a double pleasure in every enjoyment of life. What is it but the want of this, that makes the most exquisite pleasures *insipid*, and the heart of the *wicked*, in the midst of laughter, *sorrowful*?

It is a sense of religion only that teaches a man how to enjoy good in his labours, (as the wise man has expressed it) how to allay the crosses and disappointments that are apt to intrude on the happy intervals of life, and how to take his portion of pleasure, *because God answereth him in the joy of his*

his heart, chap. v. 20. Without this, a man may have riches, and health, and every thing he can desire, and yet, not enjoy himself in *any* thing; for *this*, says he, *is the gift of God*; and such a one as he never gives but to the good man.

So that, you see, men unhappily lose the best and greatest part of their satisfaction in worldly blessings; are no less injurious to themselves than to Almighty God, when they forget or neglect to acknowledge the great Author of them, from whom cometh *every good and perfect gift*. But,

II. As we are permitted to *rejoice* in the gifts of providence, so are we required to *do good* with them. This we are obliged to do on many accounts, but I shall only insist upon it at present, as it is a testimony of that common gratitude and homage we owe to our supreme Lord and Benefactor.

Gratitude is a genuine dictate of nature; and, to make returns in proportion to what is received, is a rule that runs through the whole creation: *The ox knoweth his owner*, and requites him by his labour; the earth returns the seed by a plentiful harvest, and the sea throws back the rivers that flow into it. Thus, in all societies, one kind of commerce is supported, as one nation is, by another; and all subsist upon the principle
of

of gratitude. *The king himself*, says Solomon, *is served by the field*, and the product of his country makes it worthy of his protection.

But how, you will say, shall a man express his gratitude to his Maker? Can we, by all our good works, be profitable to him, or contribute, in any respect, to the advancement of his happiness, which is already infinite, and admits of no addition? It is true, we must confess with the Psalmist, our *Goodness extendeth not unto him*; but then, our righteousness and our charity may be helpful to men like ourselves; and, the doing good to *these*, God is graciously pleased to look upon as an honour done to himself. *Whosoever giveth you a cup of cold water only*, says our kind redeemer, *in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.*

Indeed, our best services, our most extraordinary performances of this kind, amount to no more in proportion, than that small quit-rent, that free-holders agree to pay their landlord; but still, God requires it, as his due; and it is what *we* must pay, not with intent to enrich him, but only by way of acknowledgment, that we hold *all* from him.

This is that homage, whereby we may secure our title to, and our possession of, the
good

good things we enjoy under the kind protection of his good providence. And then,

III. We may observe, there is no other way to make them serviceable to our happiness, or extract any *real comfort* from them, but by thus *doing good* with them.

This is what the wise man intends chiefly to inculcate in the words before us: *I know*, says he, *that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and do good, &c.* This is the wisest improvement we can make of these things, to our present advantage, as well as our future felicity: To employ our wealth, our learning, power, and other talents, to the service of mankind, is certainly the way to make them turn to the best account, and bring in the greatest gain to ourselves: For, what other uses would we put them to?

Should we, for instance, like the miser, lock up our wealth from the world and ourselves, not *using* it at all? What pleasure can be conceived in this? What advantage, barely to behold it with our eyes? This makes us not the masters and owners of it, but rather slaves and drudges to it; this makes it a punishment to be rich, a plague and vexation, instead of a pleasure.

Should we, on the other hand, spend it in riotous and licentious living, or in those
more

more refined entertainments of life, as plays, balls, magnificent buildings, *fine furniture, sumptuous feasting, &c.* Why truly, this also is *vanity*, the pleasure these things seem to afford, is mere amusement and delusion, and will certainly be attended with remorse and pain in the end; when we come to reflect, that we have *thrown away* two of our most precious talents, *time* and *money*, which were capable of much nobler improvements; that we have spent (it may be) the best and greatest part of our life, in diversions from the main business of it.

These *trifles*, (says an ingenious author) cannot pray for us; but, the poor and distressed, they keep us from relieving, may either successfully pray to God for us, or cry to him against us. The Scripture, that represents *Dives* in hell, without saying that he oppressed or defrauded any, gives no other account of his doom, than that living at a high rate, and going richly dressed, he neglected to relieve the starving poor.

But, the pleasures of *doing good* are truly noble, sublime and lasting; will support our spirits under the worst circumstances of life, be a reviving cordial at the hour of death, when all others fail, will follow us into the other world, and be a part of the happiness of blessed spirits in Heaven.

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What mean, little things are the choicest delights of sin, in comparison to those we receive from the conscience of having, in any respect, promoted the welfare and happiness of mankind? Can all the sensual entertainments in the world administer such a solid pleasure, as the doing one good action, *such* as men must applaud and commend, *such* as God will approve and reward?

Bread and wine, says the Psalmist, *were given to strengthen and make glad the heart of man*; but it never answers this end so effectually, as when it is generously communicated to our hungry and thirsty neighbour. So that the giving *a cup of water only* in charity, the meanest and smallest benefaction to the poor and miserable, shall yield us a greater pleasure, than the spending a thousand years, if *that* were possible, in all the revels of luxury and intemperance.

This then, is the only improvement we can make of the good things of life, by thus making them instruments of doing good to mankind; since, at the same time we are *so employing them*, we are doing good to ourselves, and promoting our own happiness, both here and *hereafter*; we are taking the best method to give ourselves a true relish of the enjoyments of this life, and *lay up for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may hold on eternal life.*

S E R-

SERMON XXV.

The CHRISTIAN'S DUTY *and* HAPPINESS.

A Farewel SERMON, *preached at*
Poplar-Chapel, *in the* PARISH *of*
St. Dunstan, Stepney, *on* Sunday,
Dec. 23, 1722.

2 C O R. xiii. 11.

*Finally, brethren, farewell; be perfect, be of
good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace;
and the God of love and peace shall be
with you.*

WITH these words the Apostle
St. Paul concludes his second epistle
to the Christians of *Corinth*, and they
set before us several weighty particulars, I
would beg leave to recommend to your
present

present contemplation. And as the last words and advice of so eminent a person as our Apostle, must be supposed to contain something of no little importance, I shall use no further preface to engage your most serious and devout attention.

In the words are three general parts:

- I. The kind and charitable wish of the Apostle, *finally, brethren, farewell.*
- II. An earnest and pathetic exhortation to some of the most excellent duties of Christianity, *Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace.*
- III. The divine blessing that will attend the practice of these things, *The God of love and peace shall be with you.* And,

I. We cannot but observe and admire the charity and goodness of our Apostle in thus concluding all his rebukes and admonitions to the Christians of *Corinth*, with an affectionate wish for their welfare and happiness; an example well worthy the imitation of every Christian teacher. The Apostle had been greatly offended by the loose and irregular behaviour of some in that church, he had been personally vilified and affronted by

by others, which forced him to use many sharp and severe expressions in both his letters to them; however, notwithstanding all this, he shews them it was their *spiritual interest* he had chiefly at heart, in all his reprehensions; and whatever provocations they had formerly given him, this should not hinder him from taking his leave in peace, *finally, brethren, farewell.*

There can be no stronger motive to love and charity, than to consider we are *brethren, brethren*, not only as we are men, sons of the same common Father and Creator, but also as we are Christians, the adopted sons of God through Christ, members of the same body, and heirs of the same blessed inheritance; whatever occasions of disgust might at any time happen among such as these, it would be the most unnatural thing in the world, not to forgive and forget; and therefore, the Apostle, to shew his hearty reconciliation with them, and, as it were, desiring theirs likewise, concludes in this endearing manner, *finally, brethren, farewell.*

I thank God, I cannot, (and therefore God forbid I should) upbraid this congregation, as St. Paul does the *Corinthians*, (at the 15th ver. of the *chap.* foregoing) that *though he would readily spend, and be spent for them, yet, the more he loved, the less he was beloved by them*: For, I have always met with so

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much

much respect from the greatest part of you, that I cannot but take this public opportunity of returning you my hearty thanks. However, had there been any misunderstanding on either side, had I found as many enemies as I have friends among you, I should have thought myself obliged to declare to you, as St. Paul did of the *Jews*, Rom. x. 1. *My hearty desire and prayer to God, is, that you may be saved.* The spiritual and eternal welfare of men's souls ought to weigh down all little affronts, and should lie nearer our hearts than the greatest injuries they can do us. Charity is essential to the composition of a good Christian, and from which he should never be prevailed upon to depart, on any pretence whatsoever. It is a duty, that, as a Christian, I owe to all mankind, and much more to you, my Christian brethren, with whom I have always lived in peace, and from whom I have received many offices of friendship and civility.

And therefore, in imitation of this good Apostle, and to shew as great an instance, as I can, of a mutual affection and good-will toward you, I shall proceed,

II. To that excellent and pious exhortation, which the Apostle has put into my mouth, as the last and best advice I can give for the eternal good of your souls. *Be perfect*

perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace. And,

1st, You are here exhorted to *be perfect*, as our Lord requires in the Gospel, *Matt. v. 48. Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect*: Not that we can possibly be so perfect and holy as he is, but only, that we should do our *utmost endeavour* to be as perfect and holy as we can, that is, be upright and sincere in all our behaviour, and strive, as far as we are able, to discharge our duty in every respect, both toward God and man. For though, perhaps, we can never be so perfect as never to offend, yet we *may*, and *must* at least, *endeavour* so to do; and such a hearty and sincere endeavour will be sufficient, through the mercies of Christ, to make us perfect in God's account, and as holy as he expects we should be, in our present state of infirmity and corruption.

There is scarcely any thing more common in the world, and yet nothing more prejudicial to the souls of men, than to prevaricate and play the hypocrite with an Almighty, All-seeing God; it is a sin against which the Gospel has denounced so many dreadful woes, that, if you believe that to be the word of God, I need say nothing more to deter you from it. In all your demeanour, therefore, both toward God and man, be

upright, be honest and sincere. *Be holy in all manner of conversation, that is, in one word, be perfect.*

And, if you thus sincerely endeavour to be perfect, which every one *may*, if he please, and every one *must*, that would walk worthy of his vocation; you may then very reasonably comply with the

2d Particular of our Apostle's advice, and *be of good comfort.*

A man, that, to the best of his knowledge and power, endeavours to live in a strict and regular discharge of his duty, has the infallible promise of God, that his grace shall be sufficient for him, so that not all the powers and stratagems of hell shall ever be able to prevail against him. *For who, or what, shall harm ye, if ye be followers of that which is good?* 1 Pet. iii. 13. In this case, no temptation shall surprize you, which God will not assist you to overcome; *nothing shall happen, but he shall turn it to your good.* Such an one therefore may well be of good comfort, that is, be chearful, easy and composed, in all occurrences and conditions of life.

The first step, I confess, as the Apostle here observes, in order to obtain a chearful, serene temper of mind, is to be perfect, *finally, brethren, be perfect*; and then he adds, *be of good comfort.* The sincere practice of
piety

piety is the only way to have *peace* with God, with man, and with our own consciences; and no man can ever be of *good comfort*, that does not first endeavour to live a good life. As long as we have any sins about us unrepented of, we shall always be afflicted with *pains*, with *wounds*, *bruises*, and *putrifying sores*: Such being the condition, in which the prophet *Isaiah* has represented all sinners, *chap. i. 6.* Whereas the ways of religion are *ways of pleasantness*, and *all her paths peace*. The exercise of piety is certainly an exercise of the most exquisite pleasure our natures are capable of, and that man is the most *truly* religious, who takes the greatest pleasure in *being so*.

How frequently and earnestly are we called upon in Scripture, to *rejoice in the Lord always*, Phil. iv. 4. *To delight in the Lord*, Psalm xxxvii. 4. and be joyful in the God of our salvation, that is, to make his service our delight, and as our Saviour did, to esteem it our happiness, *our meat and drink, to do the will of our Father which is in heaven?*

And this certainly we should do, had we right apprehensions of the God we serve, or a true spiritual relish of the duties we owe him. Had we a true sense of the love and goodness of God, and a due respect to that inestimable recompence of reward, he

has promised to all his faithful servants, we should look up with joy and gladness in all our addresses to him, and perform every religious duty with alacrity and chearfulness. Whatever crosses or afflictions should at any time befall us, our hearts would be comforted and *establiſhed, ſtill truſting in the Lord*, and we ſhould be ready to join with the prophet, in that pious reſolution, *Though the fig-tree ſhall not bloſſom, nor ſhall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive ſhall fail, and the fields ſhall yield no meat, the flock ſhall be cut off from the fold, and there ſhall be no herd in the ſtall; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my ſalvation*, Hab. iii. 17, 18.

Let me exhort you then, my brethren, to look upon the ways of religion as *ways of pleaſantneſs*, and to make your *duty your delight*. Do not think it a burden to you, an enemy to your reſe, or an abridgment of any of your lawful recreations; do not reckon thoſe your enemies, that would perſuade you to love and practice it; for, be aſſured, it is the moſt effectual promoter of your preſent comfort, as it will be of your eternal happineſs. Endeavour to diſcharge the duties of religion with chearfulneſs and delight, keep out of your mind all cloudy, uncomfortable reflections; rejoice unto him with reverence, ſays the Pſalmiſt, *Pſalm ii. 11.*

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A rational mirth and pleasure is not at all inconsistent with the most reverential regard to our duty: Nay, it is certain, we have *then* done our duty best, when it fills us with joy in the Holy Ghost. Indeed, when we reflect on our sins, we cannot but mourn and lament for them; but then, if we be truly and sincerely penitent, we may be of *good comfort still, because our sins are forgiven us.*

In one word, let us rest assured, that if we do but heartily endeavour to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world, nothing shall be able to deprive us of that comfort and peace, which flows from a good conscience, or of that glorious reward we hope for in the kingdom of heaven.

But to proceed,

3^{dly}, You are further exhorted to be of one mind, to live in peace. *Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace.* I put both these parts of the Apostle's advice together, because the one seems to be a kind of explanation of the other. For Christians to be of one mind in all matters of religion, though it were a thing extremely to be desired, yet, in fact, seems very difficult, if not impossible: However, *they may live in peace notwithstanding;*

they may exercise love and charity, and be peaceable toward one another in their manners and behaviour, if they cannot exactly agree in their thoughts and opinions. If they do differ in smaller matters, they may unite, if they please, in the common bond of Christian charity; and so far all Christians *must* agree, and be of one mind; they must be all kindly affectioned one toward another. They must, if possible, join in the same communion and fellowship, in the same faith, in the worship of the same God and Saviour; and if they cannot maintain unity of judgment in all points, they must endeavour to be so far of one mind, *as to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*, as the Apostle speaks, *Eph. iv. 3.*

There is no duty more earnestly pressed upon us by Christ in his Gospel, than this of love and union; it was what he insisted upon with his dying breath, and what he seems the most desirous of in his last solemn prayer to his heavenly Father. Peace was his last and precious legacy, *peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you*, John xiv. 27. Though God knows, the Christians of this age have almost entirely lost it. *This is my commandment, says he, that ye love one another; hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

Again,

Again, *John xvii. 11. Holy Father, keep through thy own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are one.* And at the 23d verse, we find the preservation of this unity to be the perfection of Christians, *I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.*

In the same strain speak all the Apostles; St. Paul in language sufficient to move the most savage, *If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship in the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies; fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind, Phil. ii. 1.* And St. John, in almost every line of his Epistles, entreats us in the most affectionate manner, *Little children, love one another.*

In like manner, let me entreat you, if it be possible, and as much as lieth in you, be of one mind, and live peaceably with all men. Be sure, in the first place, that you adhere constantly to the holy faith professed in this pure branch of Christ's church, wherein you have been educated, *the church of England*: Let no temptation entice you, let no prejudice or disgust whatever prevail upon you to depart from its communion; for you may depend upon this, nothing sinful is there required of you, and if you do but your part, if you do but take care to walk
worthy

worthy of your profession, you cannot possibly miscarry in your way to salvation.

Hold fast this profession then without wavering, continue stedfast in this communion and worship, observe all the ordinances of the church with due devotion, and at all opportunities frequent the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's-Supper.

And as for our adversaries of all kinds, though you cannot think just as they do, if it be possible, live in peace with them. Let not their obstinacy or perverseness deprive you of that excellent grace of charity; if in our disputes with them we should lose this jewel, they would gain a mighty advantage over us indeed: But let it be your principal care to keep your innocence and your temper, and to make your own *ways please the Lord*, and then he will make your enemies be at peace with you; at least, he will so far preserve and protect you, that their malice shall only tend to the encrease of your virtues here, and your reward in heaven.

Thus, according to the Apostle, let it be your constant care to *follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*, Heb. xii. 14. Be sincerely pious and holy in your own life and conversation, and to the utmost of your power encourage and promote unity, peace and concord in the world. To this end, let every
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one study to be quiet, and mind his own business; let none of you be censured *as a busy-body, or medler in other men's matters*; believe not every idle tale, and never give countenance to those unchristian methods of slander and detraction, so common in every neighbourhood. There would not be half that envy, hatred, and contention among men, if every good Christian would resolve to discourage and reject the many lying stories carried about by such as love to sow division. Charity obliges us to think and speak favourably, to judge candidly, and put the fairest construction on the words and actions of all men; and we should not think one another such brutes and monsters, if we would but fairly and calmly look each other in the face, and give no ear to the calumnies and misrepresentations of tale-bearers and slanderers.

But let me intreat you all, by the mercies of God, and in the bowels of meekness, to keep clear of *this* and all the other reigning vices of this infamous, corrupted age; *be perfect*, at least, strive to be so, and walk as becometh the Gospel of Christ. And then,

2dly, Be of good comfort. Persuade yourselves, that the sincere practice of piety is your greatest happiness and comfort; for it certainly will be so, both in this world, and
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the next. And, lastly, *Be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*

Which brings me to the

III^d. and last thing to be considered in the text, viz. The unspeakable blessing that will attend the practice of these things, *The God of love and peace shall be with you.*

Follow peace with all men, and holiness toward God, and you shall see, 1 Pet. iii. 10. *good days here,* and be blessed with an eternity of happiness hereafter. The God of love and peace shall dwell in your hearts, and be a constant refuge and support to you all the days of your life in this world, and you shall dwell with him, and behold his glory for evermore, in that which is to come.

Having thus gone through the several branches of my text, what remains, brethren, but that I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified, *Acts xx. 32.* I have spoke my thoughts freely to you, I hope without offence, and that you will receive what you have heard, with the same candour and respect, with which it hath been delivered; I am sure, I have persuaded you to nothing, but what you will reap
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the benefit of *yourselves*, nothing but what you will find, upon mature consideration, absolutely necessary to your *present* and *eternal* consolation.

I have now but one request more to make to you, and that shall be in behalf of myself, and in the words of the Apostle, to the *Thessalonians*, *Brethren, pray for us*, 1 *Thess.* v. 25.

I need not remind you of the great benefits and advantages of prayer, and how excellent a piece of charity it is for Christians to pray one for another. *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man*, we are told, *availeth much*; and surely, no sort of men can stand more in need of such prayers, than the ministers of God's holy word. They have a hard and tremendous office to discharge, to turn men from their beloved sins and lusts, to a sober and serious life, from that darkness which they *love* to wander in, to that glorious light which they *hate* to walk by; *to turn men from the power of Satan, to the service of God, and the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*. This is an undertaking extremely difficult and hazardous, and who, alas! is *sufficient for these things*? Who is able to go through with, or discharge so great an office, with any tolerable success, without the assistance of divine grace, and the fervent
daily

daily prayers of all good Christians? Who is able to carry himself so upright and circumspect, as not sometimes to give offence? And then the least stumble that we make, the least fault we are guilty of, in our example, shall render all our preaching and admonitions ineffectual. We are subject to *error* in our opinions, to *irregularity* in our behaviour, as other men are; but our mistakes and failings do more mischief in the world, and are, for that reason, more inexcusable than those of other men.

Let me, therefore, *beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, that you strive together in your prayers to God for me*, Rom. xv. 30. That in your solemn supplications for the ministers of God's word, you would sometimes remember me, though an unworthy one, that God would never leave me destitute of such gifts, as are necessary to a due discharge of my office, nor of grace to use them always to his glory, that I may adorn the holy function I have taken upon me, with an exemplary piety, humility, charity, and all other Christian graces, 1 Cor. ix. 27. 2 Cor. vi. 3. *Left, after I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away;—that I may give no offence in any thing whereby the ministry may be blamed; that he would succour my weakness, and improve my mean*
abili-

abilities, with so large a portion of his heavenly grace and benediction, that both by *my life and doctrine* I may set forth his glory, and set forward the salvation of men.

For my own part, as I have hitherto had you in remembrance, so I *shall not cease to bow my knees to the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and all judgment, Ephes. iii. 14. Phil. i. 9, 10.* that ye may approve and follow whatsoever things are excellent, true, honest, pure, just, praise-worthy and of good report; that ye may be sincere and without offence, till the day of Christ; that he would grant you, according to the riches of his grace, to be strengthened and comforted by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, and that ye may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge: That God would prosper and bless you and your families with all things convenient for your present comfort in this world, and above all, that he would deliver you from every evil work, and preserve you with his heavenly grace, that we may all meet in the kingdom of glory.

Now unto him that is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think, according

according to the power that worketh in us,
to him be glory in the Church, by Christ
Jesus, throughout all ages, world without
end. *Amen. Eph. iii. 20, 21.*

S E R M O N XXVI.

The good Man's RESOLUTION.

*The last SERMON he preached at St. Magnus
by LONDON-BRIDGE.*

J O B xiv. 14.

—All the days of my appointed time will
I wait till my change come.

THIS present life, which most men are so fond of, what is it at best but a scene of trouble and confusion? Where we are ever liable to changes and vicissitudes, *elevated* for a while with delusive pleasures, and then overwhelmed with real sorrows. All that we see or enjoy in the world is of so precarious a continuance, that the most happy and

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prosperous walk but in a *vain shadow*, and find infinite occasions of complaint. *Virtue* and *goodness* (the most desirable thing in this life) may deliver from hell, yet it is no exemption from afflictions and crosses, from sickness and death: Nay, the more a man shines above his fellows in *virtue*, the more exposed oftentimes he is to the *severest trials* and temptations.

A memorable instance of which, we see in that holy man, whose example I am now recommending in the text: From the highest affluence and prosperity, he found himself reduced on a sudden, to the lowest state of poverty and misery; and he, who was *the greatest lord of all the east*, had now scarce one compassionate friend to alleviate his sorrows; a very *sad and mournful change*! And yet, he seemed to bear it with a serene and steady temper: Abating the *infirmities* of human nature, his deportment in general was decent and noble, such as God himself vouchsafed to applaud and set forth, as a pattern for the rest of mankind.

Now the means, whereby he attained to this eminency of virtue, was by the serious contemplation of *God's providence* and his own *dissolution*; he considered, that all those things we call accidents and casualties, were directed by the unerring hand of God; and that death, the greatest of changes, would
soon

soon put an end to all other changes and revolutions. He was persuaded God was *good*, though he often afflicted good men; and that death could do no ill to one who deserved none, but was rather a thing to be embraced with joy, as putting a final period to all misfortunes.

Thus his faith buoyed him up under all the storms, wherewith God was pleased to afflict him: Nay, *though he slay me*, (says he) *yet will I trust in him*, chap. xiii. 15. *I will maintain my own ways before him, he also shall be my salvation*. This enabled him to bear with patience all the evils of life, and to wait with comfort for the approach of death.

For, since the life of man, (as he observes, *verse 1. of this chapter*) was *but short*, as it was *full of trouble*, and God had *determined his days, and appointed his bounds that he cannot pass*, ver 5. What better resolution could he take up, than that of the text, *All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come*. Which words point out these two things for our consideration :

- I. That there is a very great and remarkable *change*, which, in God's appointed time, shall happen to all the sons of men.

II. *What is to be done by way of preparation for it: All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.*

1. There is a great and remarkable *change*, which, in God's appointed time, shall happen to all the sons of men. For,

Is it not *appointed* for all men *once to die*? An *irreversable sentence*! which no man can evade, whether rich or poor, wise or foolish, prosperous or afflicted; whatever our stations or conditions be, in this world, we must all, sooner or later, dislodge and change our habitations; when the body shall be converted to dust, as it was originally formed from it, and *the Spirit return to God who gave it*.

The whole world is but one dismal scene of mortality; which way soever we turn our eyes, we still meet with the frail images of corruption, are continually surrounded with the horrible shapes of death, and the black formalities of the grave. The time will come, when it shall be said of every one of us, as *Jacob* did of two of his sons, *Joseph is not*, and *Simeon is not*.

Now, we *are*, that is, are reckoned among the number of mortals, and have a being in this world; *then*, we shall *not be*, that is,
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no longer inhabitants of this world, but shall belong to another.

For, we are not to think, that death utterly dissolves our being; it is not an *annihilation* but a *change*: It does not reduce us to nothing, (as wicked men conceive) it only alters our form, and puts us into a different manner of being from what we have in this life.

It is, indeed, a change, and a very considerable one, in many respects. For,

1. It changes the state of soul and body, it dissolves that close union whereby they were tied together, removing the one into the mansion of departed Spirits, whilst it lays the other in the dust.

2. It changes our place of habitation, it takes us out of this world where we are but strangers and sojourners, and *have no continuing city* as the Apostle tells us, *but we seek one to come*. Now death translates good men to this blessed place they seek after, it brings them to their long *desired home*, even to that glorious kingdom, where Christ is gone before to prepare a mansion for us. Again,

3. It changes our company and conversation. Here we converse with frail men, sinful

creatures, peevish, obstinate and proud, constant to nothing but their own follies: But death exalts us to the glorious company of angels, to the goodly fellowship of prophets, to the noble army of martyrs, and to the *Spirits of just men made perfect*.

4. Our condition here is continually exposed to misery and trouble; we are apt to be deceived and destroyed by *sensual delights*. But now death will deliver us from these snares and dangers, will close up this *amusing scene*, in one eternal night of oblivion; will draw a veil over all the dazzling objects of sense, and set us above the reach of sin and temptation.

This is the happy change, which death occasions to good men, and such as are prepared for it; but then, as for the wicked and impenitent, their change, I confess, is horrible, to be dreaded above all evils, as being the worst and greatest evil that can possibly befall them.

From the loose reins of sin, they are conveyed to a place of darkness and despair; from the company of sinners, to that of the Devil and his angels; from *anxious fears* and guilty apprehensions, to *actual torments*, to *real and eternal punishment*.

Now, one of these different changes all undergo, that proceed from the loins of
Adam;

Adam; for, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death must pass upon all, since all have sinned. Death is the natural effect, the necessary consequence of sin; and, we must first be free from sin, before we can be exempted from mortality.

There is, indeed, another change, which we Christians expect after death, which will make us ample amends for the ruin and dissolution of our present corrupted nature; and that is, the glorious resurrection and renewal of our bodies at the last day; and which, it is possible, this holy man had some *respect to* in the text; for he says just before, *If a man die, shall he live again?* which seems to imply, as if he believed he *should*. And the thoughts of this made him immediately resolve, *All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.*

However, as no man can be prepared for a glorious resurrection at the last day, who is not well prepared for death, I shall understand the *change* here mentioned, of this *last* only; and since it is what must first pass upon all, and determine our condition to all eternity, I shall proceed,

II. To consider what is to be done by way of preparation for it: *All the days of my*

pointed time will I wait, till my change come. Holy Job's method, we see, was to *wait*, that is, to live in daily expectation of it. Therefore,

1. To *prepare for our change*, we are daily to expect it. Here we have no constant abiding place, and must therefore *seek* for one to come; here we are *strangers and pilgrims*, detained in a foreign country, and must not look upon this as our home; we are *here* only as *stewards*, who, if they are wise, will wait hourly for the return of their master, and faithfully improve their time and talents to the best purposes, that they may not be *ashamed or confounded* when their Lord cometh. Yea, blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find *so doing*.

And, indeed, nothing but this can prepare us for a safe and happy change; nothing tends so much to take off the terror of death, as a constant expectation of it. We may converse with the most *dreadful* objects, when, by custom, we have made them *familiar*. Now, the frequent contemplation of death will take off that horror and amazement, that trembling and confusion, which the strangeness and surprise of a thing is apt to occasion in us. And, since it is a cup which all must drink of, it is but common prudence to have it always in our eye,

eye, and consider by what means we may do it with safety, with honour, and advantage.

If we must die, it concerns us to take care that we die happily; but that absolutely depends upon our living well; and nothing has such an influence on the good government of our lives, as the frequent remembrance that we must die. This will be a perpetual antidote against the follies and vanities of the world, and the most prevailing incitement to virtue: This will *teach us so to number our days, as to apply our hearts unto wisdom*. Some, indeed, put the thoughts of this evil day *far from them*, for fear it should strike a damp upon their pleasures, and make them *thoughtful* and serious; but surely, this is the height of folly and distraction.

If men *must* die, why should they not often think of it, and *seriously* prepare for it? How many thousands might have been saved, and happy for ever, had they only given themselves that little trouble and pains, as soberly to have *considered their latter end*, while they had time and opportunity in their hands?

This would soon have taught them the vanity of this world, and the deceitfulness of sin, the knowledge of themselves and their own real happiness. This would expose

pose the folly of covetousness and ambition, and shew us the absurdity of pursuing the pleasures of sense. For why should a man take so much pride in heaping up riches, *adding house to house, and field to field*, when he considers this world is not his home, that he must shortly remove his *dwelling*, that he can carry none of these things away with him, can reap no benefit from them, except he return them *thither* before-hand, in acts of piety and charity? Why should he let his mind swell with the thoughts of his power, his honour, and authority over the rest of his fellow creatures? When, alas! it is all a bubble, which every breath of air can blow away. For, what is man arrayed in all his glory? He appears gay and beautiful, as a flower in the spring, but is soon cut down and withered. If he meet with no storm, no outward violence to discompose his happiness, yet he must leave the world, the scene of life will change, and there is an end of all worldly grandeur. Or, why should we be so extremely fond of the pleasures of sense, or let the body encroach so much upon the mind? when we reflect, that this *body must* die, and all its pleasures with it; that they are, indeed, killing pleasures, which often destroy the body before its time; that the soul, on the other side, must live for ever,
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and should therefore desire more lasting pleasures, which may survive the funeral of the body, and be a spring of fresh and immortal joys, when stripped of this earthly tabernacle.

These are some of the reflections, which the consideration of our change will naturally suggest to us; and these thoughts will carry a strong influence on our manners, will tend to correct the temper of our minds, will keep us from being imposed upon by the pageantry of this world; and therefore, it highly concerns us *thus* to wait, as *Job* did, *all the days of our appointed time, till our change come.*

2. To prepare, as we ought, for this great change, we should take all possible care in spending our time. This is that precious talent, on the good or bad employment of which depends our eternity; and therefore, we should not waste it in idle diversions or stupid thoughtlessness, as if sleep, sloth, and sensual pleasure was the main business and design of life; much less should we abuse it in gratifying our exorbitant lusts, in beating our brains to promote vice and impiety, and to discountenance and banish all virtue and religion out of the world.

Whatever our calling be, we should pursue it with an honest industry, with justice
and

and charity; always remembering we have a Christian profession to mind, of much higher dignity, of greater importance and concern.

Are we possessed of wealth and understanding; we should consider we are under greater obligations to make a good use of our time, because we have greater opportunities of doing good in the world. Are we rich in worldly goods; we should strive to be *rich in good works*, to communicate to the wants of others, in proportion to what we have received from the divine bounty; to be *merciful, as our Father is merciful*, remembering always that the great enquiry at the last day, will be, whether we have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, relieved the stranger, and ministered to the sick and those in prison; and, according as our behaviour has been in this point, so shall we be received into happiness, or condemned to everlasting punishment.

What horror and anxiety then will overwhelm our souls, when we lie down on our dying beds, and reflect how little of our time or substance has been laid out in these charitable offices, which were given us, *only* for those great ends! How earnestly shall we then wish, that we had been more *liberal* to our poor brethren, and more sparing to our own lusts? That we had taken more care to
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feed Christ's hungry members, and less to pamper and indulge our own: That we had been more solicitous for the relieving the distressed servants of God, than for the gratifying our own *sinful appetites*.

These awful considerations should excite us to embrace all opportunities of doing good, make us willing to give, and glad to distribute to the necessities of saints; that so, by shewing mercy to the poor, we may entitle ourselves to the *mercy* of God, and secure an interest in that merciful redeemer of mankind, who became poor, to make us rich, and humbled himself even to death, that he might make us inheritors of eternal life.

3. To provide for this our change, and to make it easy and happy, we must endeavour to wean our minds from the *love* of this corruptible world, and fix them on those substantial blessings which endure for evermore.

The pleasures of flesh and sense are but short-lived amusements; they serve us, indeed, in our present circumstances, while we are travelling through this vale of sorrow, but will be of no manner of use when we come to our journey's end.

And, *wilt thou then set thine eyes upon that which is not, which is but a mere shadow, the*
offspring

offspring of fancy and imagination? Or, shall we make ourselves slaves to what can afford no help or comfort when we have most need of it?

As for all the glories of this world, which are so much admired by weak men, what can they do for us in the hour of death, or in the day of judgment? Riches, if ill-gotten or ill-spent, will be an eternal torment to the unhappy owner: They may raise a stately monument, to preserve his memory in this world, but can never purchase one moment's ease to the soul in the other. Honours and preferments can be no ways acceptable to one that is going to lie down in the grave, and have his mouth stopped with clay; they serve no other end but the embellishment of an escutcheon, and to lay our honour *in the dust* with the greater pomp and solemnity. Nothing, in short, but a life of virtue, can support us under the dismal agonies of death; it is this only that can disarm the fury of that dreadful enemy to mankind; it is *this* only that will make us lie down in the grave, as on the softest bed after a hard day's labour, in the joyful hopes of rising again to immortal happiness.

As for all *other things*, they cannot attend us beyond the grave; there will be no remembrance of them in the land where all things

things are forgotten, where nothing will avail but the prayers and beneficent actions of a virtuous life.

And, how dreadful a thing then must death be to a man whose mind is wholly bent upon the concerns of this life, and never expects his change? To such, death must come arrayed in all its terror. To tear them from the world, is to tear them from themselves; they are so closely united to it, that it is as great a violence to separate them from it, as to part their souls and bodies, which consequently will be attended with the pangs and tortures of a double death. To take them hence, is to destroy all their hopes, and to ruin them for ever.

Whereas, he that has disengaged his affections from the world, that remembers all its pleasures, must one day be left behind, and will take their eternal farewell, can patiently wait his appointed time, and when his change comes, can submit with pleasure, and receive it with *courage* and *cheerfulness*. Which is the

4th. and last thing I shall mention as a necessary preparation for this great change, *viz.* that we learn to submit with patience to the will of God, in all our *pains* and *sickness*, and every other affliction he is pleased

pleased to lay upon us. As, on the one hand, we must chearfully resign our souls, whenever God is pleased to call us; so, on the other, we must never grow impatient under his visitations, or desire to rid ourselves of the burden of life, before he thinks *fit to release us*. Under the most severe pangs and sorrows, we should consider with holy *Job, What! shall we receive good at the Hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*

As God is a Being infinitely good and merciful, gracious and benign, and does not willingly afflict the children of men, so he is infinitely wise too; he only knows the most proper methods to fit and qualify us for the glories of heaven; he is the best judge, *when*, and by what ways, to conduct us to that happy state where all tears shall be wiped away from our eyes; and therefore, be our lives ever so uncomfortable, be our sickness ever so painful and tedious, yet, this is certain, God knows better how to chuse for us than we do ourselves: He only knows when we are prepared for death, and as he first gave us life, so he certainly knows the fittest season to take it from us.

In the mean time, we should be sincerely thankful for all the mercies of life, and those peculiar comforts wherewith he softens and allays our sorrows; acknowledging, that
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we suffer far less than we deserve, that we enjoy many blessings of which we are altogether unworthy. Why therefore, as the Prophet very justly expostulates, *Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sin?*

To conclude: Since *there is an appointed time for man upon earth*; since, as his life is *full of trouble*, so it is but *short*, and limited to a *few days*; when a change will come speedily, a *glorious and happy* change, if it be not our own fault, which will put an end to all our present pains, and translate us to a state of immortal glory: What remains, but that we *wait* with all humility, and prepare for it with diligence, by the constant exercise of piety, charity, and all good works? That so, when this *earthly tabernacle*, this *building of clay*, whose foundation is *in the dust*, this *vile, corruptible* body shall be dissolved, we may have a *House not made with hands*, a house of God's building, *eternal in the heavens*.

And, may every one of us be so wise as to consider our latter end, and so to *number* every day of our lives, as *to apply our hearts to true wisdom*; that as we grow in years, we may grow in grace, improve in knowledge, obedience, and all other Christian graces; that when we arrive at the end of

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our days, we may obtain the end of our faith, even the eternal salvation of our souls, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

F I N I S.

